Commentary

VOLUME NINETY • NUMBER THREE • SEPTEMBER 1990

The American 80's

Disaster or Triumph?

A Symposium

Jeane J. Kirkpatrick • Robert B. Reich • George Gilder
Paul Berman • Charles Murray • Christopher Lasch
Joseph Epstein • John B. Judis • Charles Horner • Paul Starr
Michael Novak • William Phillips • James Nuechterlein
Robert Coles • Tom Bethell • Paul Kennedy
Richard John Neuhaus • Eugene D. Genovese • Hilton Kramer

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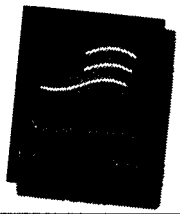

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Letters from Readers

Government & the Arts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I read with interest Samuel Lipman's "Backward & Downward With the Arts" [May]; in fact, I read and reread it several times.

I did this because while I do not agree with all the examples Mr. Lipman cites, I do resoundingly believe his final conclusion is correct: government support for programs that will make possible, in the phrase he quotes from Coleridge, "the harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity."

I am strongly in favor of recognizing the changing demographics of our nation. After all, the Census Bureau predicts that by the turn of the century our population base will be, for the first time in our history, 49 percent Caucasian—but our basic humanity, the ideas that built and sustain this nation of ours, is essentially Western-oriented. I do not believe a collection of minority cultures should make us turn our backs on this American civilization whose spiritual and intellectual guidelines have been a beacon of hope and possibility for peoples all over the world.

There is room for all, but in making that room we should be careful to guard our traditional basic values. Both the humanities and the arts should not lose sight of these truths.

SCHUYLER CHAPIN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Samuel Lipman lucidly depicts the confused policies of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), but ends with unjustified recommendations. The NEA acts as if distinguishing art from non-art and pornography is impossible, or, at least, undemocratic (a bizarre idea); or as if the NEA is inherently incapable of discriminating (which may be true). Why then should anyone support the NEA's granting money randomly to persons claiming to be artists? How does this serve art or society? (Blaming peer panels won't do: they are the NEA's invention and it is responsible for their capriciousness.) As Mr. Lipman stresses, "affirmative action"—grants based on criteria irrelevant to artistic merit—raises aesthetic nondiscrimination to a positive principle and reveals the NEA as an enemy of art and merit.

Despite all this, Mr. Lipman concludes by advocating government subsidies to art—to the right kind, to true art. (Nobody is for the wrong kind—even affirmative-action groupies don't admit that they are.) But Mr. Lipman does not tell us how the NEA can (or will want to) detect true art, how it will acquire a capacity or inclination it has hitherto not shown. Popes, princes, private persons often have discerned great contemporary artists. Modern governments have not. Mr. Lipman's hopes that they will rest on wishful thinking.

Yet Mr. Lipman does not question the need to subsidize art. Why? European governments have traditionally subsidized art and religion, thought to be the principal means of indoctrination and of forging the bonds of social cohesion—before newspapers, radio, and TV. Although art and religion have become marginalized, the tradition continues in Europe. It never existed in the U.S., where baseball and movies (without federal subsidy) have been more central to the social bond. Art never was.

Subsidies to art are unjustified. They are also unjust. Tax money taken from the (less affluent) majority is spent for the benefit of the (far more affluent) minority who enjoy subsidized art. It has never been explained why subsidized art is good for people who do not want to hear or see (let alone pay for) it. I am not sure that art is good for people who care for it, either. But they are entitled to enjoy what they are willing to pay for.

To be sure, individuals often are taxed for things they may not want, such as public parks, the navy, or the police. But these things cannot be purchased individually; and benefits cannot be limited to those willing to pay. Hence taxes. Not so with art. Individuals can purchase it (or tickets to it) or refrain, in which case they do not benefit. There is no more reason to subsidize art than there is to subsidize bananas. I should, therefore, be against the NEA even if Mr. Lipman could miraculously direct its grants to meritorious artists.

ERNEST VAN DEN HAAG
New York City

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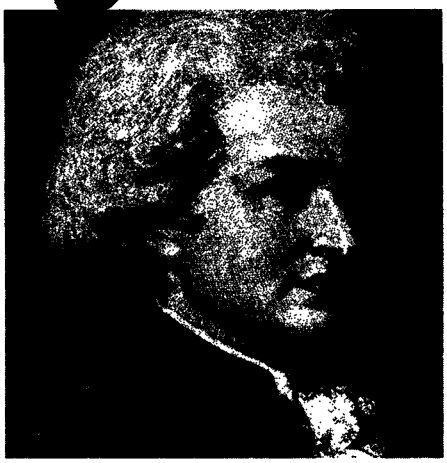

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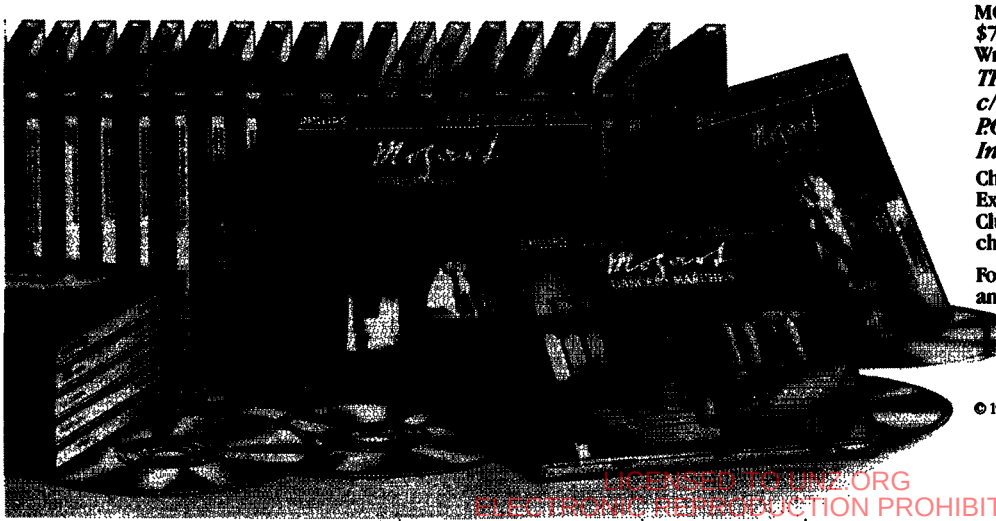

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TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Samuel Lipman's "Backward & Downward With the Arts" justly places contemporary art precisely where it belongs—on the cutting-edge of nihilism. . . . [But] Mr. Lipman and I part company on the government's role in the funding of art. The question of obscenity is secondary. The truth is that art is primarily a vehicle for the privileged. And the tax money that supports it comes in large part from the segment of society that least benefits from it. There is an enormous contradiction here. . . .

As for the social benefits of art, this is a convenient figment of the artistic imagination. To perpetuate this myth, one must be hopelessly naive about the social function and significance of art. . . . The collective artistic genius of every age has afforded immeasurable benefit to a fortunate few, but society at large has witnessed no amelioration through art. I defy the art world to cite a single work, in any field, which has bettered society. . . .

Art lovers are among the most privileged economic group in society. Their love of art must be the impetus that moves them to accept the financial responsibility for art. The decision is remarkably easy. I put my money where my Shakespeare is. And my Bach. And my Rembrandt. And my Goethe.

TONY CASTELVECCHI
Spencer, North Carolina

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . It is not surprising that affirmative action has undercut the credibility of the NEA and that the nonsensical concept of "multiculturalism" has become the tool by which the artistic elite attempts to relativize Western art. Humanities departments at our major colleges and universitites have been doing the same ideological posturing with the same disastrous results for years. . . .

Mr. Lipman and others in favor of continuing the National Endowments argue that $300 million is "small money" as far as federal programs go. This may be true, but it does not make it any easier for many Americans to see even a "small" amount of their money being "pissed" away on artists like Andres Serrano. . . .

Encouraging people to support the arts endowment of their choice would seem to be the proper democratic response to the current NEA (and NEH) paradox. Those who want to fund the works of artists like Serrano, Mapplethorpe, and Sprinkle may do so, and if this ends up being our "cultural inheritance," then we will be getting the culture we deserve.

What has gotten those in the artistic community so irate and active in supporting (specifically) the NEA is that if people were free to "vote" with their dollars (and were consequently more aware of how their money is spent), then the above-mentioned artists would simply not be funded. What the artistic community wants is a moral blank check and it views the government as the means to get it. . . .

SEAN GERETY
New Fairfield, Connecticut

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

At the conclusion of his article, Samuel Lipman nudges us gently but a little too quickly past his first option: the rejection of government support for the arts. I for one do not agree that "one of the tasks of the federal government is to foster a common civilization." In my view, art, the highest manifestation of civilization, is best allowed to flourish outside government. . . .

The rejection of government support for the arts would not in any way constitute an abandonment of public life to one particular group, hostile or otherwise. It would simply, and appropriately, shift the burden of support to those individuals and organizations with the greatest concern and the best means of expressing it.

HARVEY GORDON
Kalamazoo, Michigan

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

The National Endowment for the Arts should be abolished. In the twenty-five years since it was established, the NEA has had ample opportunity to show what it can do. Occasionally what it does is help to perpetrate some outrage against civilized taste, as it did with the Mapplethorpe exhibit, but more often what it does is sink the arts into a sea of banality.

The NEA is the main engine for the professionalization of the arts in the United States. One of its most pronounced effects is the creation of artists who no longer have to depend on the appeal of their work to any particular audience other than their professional peers whose approval is necessary to secure continued funding from the NEA and its state-level clones.

This closed loop of artists who are the sole judges of the merit of other artists' work mimics the peer-review process in the sciences and the humanities, but there is one essential difference. While the sciences and humanities are sometimes afflicted with disputes about priorities, they at least aspire to standards based on scientific and scholarly merit. The contemporary art world admits no such standards. In their absence, the peer-review process is little more than a game of personal networks, private dicta, and staying abreast of the latest trends. . . .

The solution is either to abolish the NEA or drastically reform it. I agree with Samuel Lipman that, in principle, we ought not "to abandon public life" to those hostile to our cultural traditions. But the NEA, so long as it continues to abet entrenched opposition to those traditions, is the fortress of the enemy. We would take a giant step forward simply by turning over control of the federal patronage system for the arts to some other agency that is not part of the current morass. The National Endowment for the Humanities would be a good choice, but even the Forest Service would be an improvement.

IRMAR RABB
Boston, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In his article, Samuel Lipman has both accurately described and incisively interpreted the current crisis in public confidence in the National Endowment for the Arts. His is the single most compelling statement of the issues that has emerged. In the four years during which our terms as members of the National Council on the Arts overlapped (1984-88), I observed precisely what Mr. Lipman has here set forth. This is a brilliant statement of exactly how things were, and why we have come to our present pass.

JACOB NEUSNER
University of South Florida
Tampa, Florida

SAMUEL LIPMAN writes:

I want to begin with Schuyler Chapin, not because he represents the tenor of most of the letters I have received about my article, but

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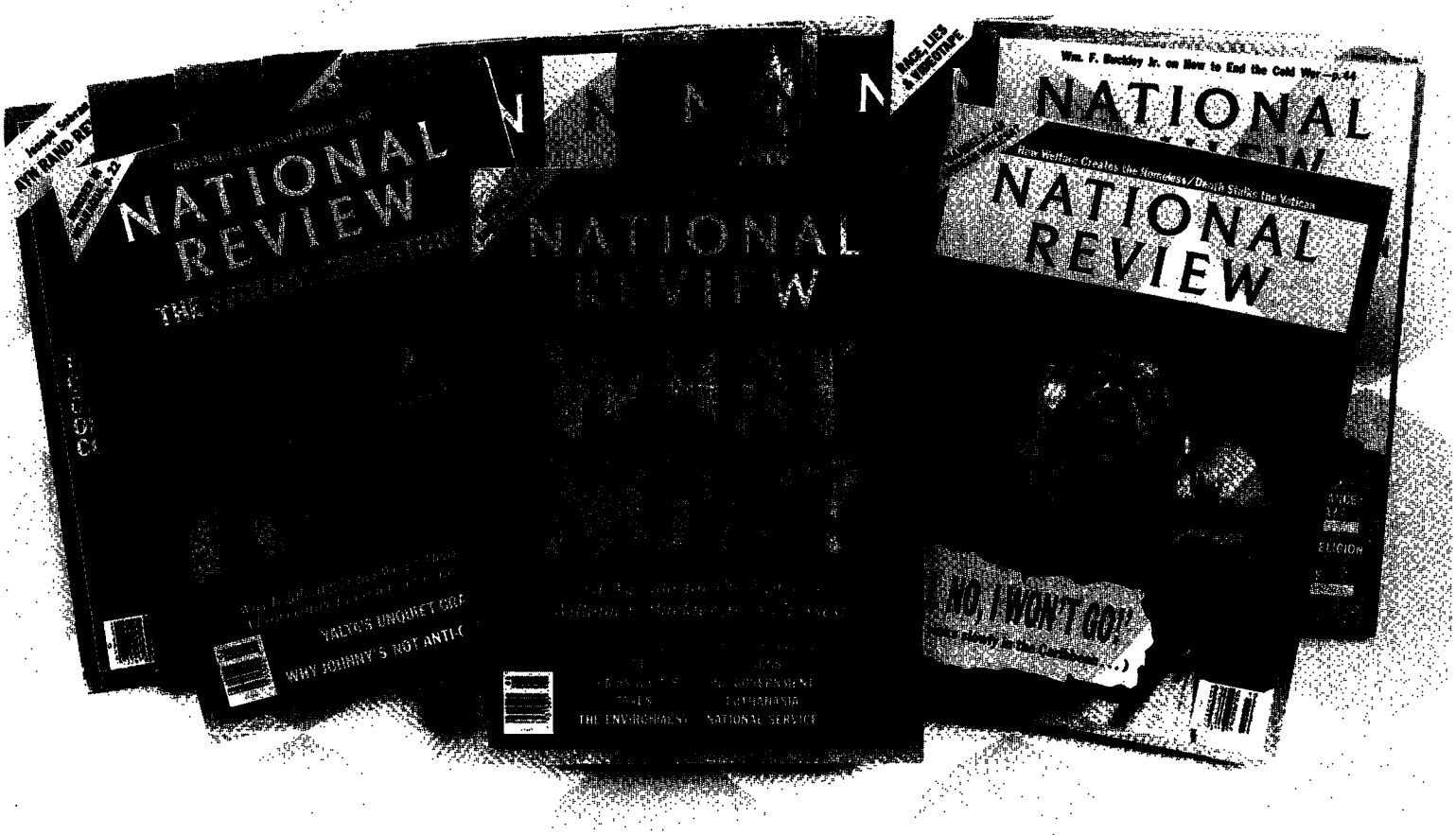

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because he is a major spokesman for the American arts-advocacy establishment. Mr. Chapin has had a long career in arts management; for a brief time in the early 1970's he was general manager of the Metropolitan Opera, and for many years thereafter he was dean of Columbia University's School of the Arts. It is more important for the present discussion that Mr. Chapin was a founder and then the long-time board chairman of the Independent Committee on Arts Policy, a "blue-ribbon" group totally supported by the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations.

I do not remember, and have now had no luck in finding, any evidence that the Independent Committee, made up as it is of such luminaries as Toni Morrison, Susan Sontag, and Vartan Gregorian, ever advocated the "American civilization" and "traditional basic values" that Mr. Chapin espouses in his letter. On the contrary, as recently as the fall of 1988, the Independent Committee's published recommendations to the incoming Bush administration managed to avoid any use of the word civilization, save for a single citation of the title of the NEA's then-new arts-education report to Congress, *Toward Civilization*. Furthermore, when the Independent Committee report went on to list the reasons for advocating arts education, it totally avoided any discussion of great art and learning, only mentioning such stale formulations as responding to experience, making images of the child's world, and experiencing and understanding other societies.

I therefore cannot but question whether Mr. Chapin's letter is really articulating a strongly held position. It rather seems to me that he may well only be voicing the arts-advocacy establishment's fear that because of the recent NEA scandals something might have changed on the American cultural and political scene.

The letters of Messrs. van den Haag, Castelvecchi, Gerety, Gordon, and Rabb, for all the different points they make, present a widely held conservative position on public culture and government support of the arts and the humanities. This position can be briefly put, I hope without causing needless offense to any of my correspondents. According to this position, there is no need, duty, or right for government to support any kind of culture, and in particular to support any kind of high culture. Such support is unjust because it of necessity favors the culture of an elite minority over that of the democratic majority. Such support, so the argument goes, is also harmful because it corrupts the natural development of civilization and tends inevitably to further a radical agenda. Government support of culture is therefore potentially poisonous and in any case mistaken.

Political conservative though I undoubtedly am, I cannot accept this position. It seems to me that government—especially our democratic government—is the trustee of society and the custodian of society's highest values. I believe that the performance of this trusteeship has historically been a major *raison d'être* of both our once-admirable public schools and land-grant colleges. As Louis Brandeis correctly wrote many years ago, government is a great teacher. That our government has often failed in its mission does not negate the fact that it is just such a teacher of society, whether for good or for ill. The question is not whether government will affect our culture, the question is what its effect will be. What government does in culture must further our common goals. These goals have always included, and continue to include, the protection and extension of high culture and high civilization.

That such has not been the case in all too much of the recent history of the NEA cannot be denied. The recent scandals, and doubtless many more which have not yet come to public attention, have fundamentally damaged the agency. It is a plain truth that the NEA must be basically altered. Without such alteration there is no argument to be made for the agency's continued existence. On this point I agree with my conservative correspondents.

I am happy to thank Jacob Neusner for his lovely words. Such words usually come as a surprise, and are always a pleasure to receive.

Immigration Policy

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . In their effort to minimize the scale and impact of immigration, Ben J. Wattenberg and Karl Zinsmeister ["The Case for More Immigration," April] employ a barrage of debater's tricks that I am surprised to find in the pages of COMMENTARY. After mentioning a figure of 200,000 illegal immigrants per year, the authors add that annual *emigration* (which has nothing to do with illegal immigration) is 160,000; this leaves the average reader with the impression (without its being said outright) that net illegal immigration is only 40,000—a gross falsehood. On the basis of that 40,000 figure, they declare that total legal and illegal immigration is 650,000 per year. But the true total, by the most conservative estimates possible, is 800,000, and is much more likely to be well over a million.

After assuring us that we need not be concerned about the effect of immigration on population growth—since "there is no long-term population explosion under way in this country"—Messrs. Wattenberg and Zinsmeister turn around and champion an endless population boom, fed by immigration, as the very fountainhead of prosperity! But the truth is that immigration is already a major factor in population growth, contributing at least 33 percent of the national increase of 2.2 million per year (45 percent if we count the children of immigrants born here). Those percentages are much higher in California and New York. The Census Bureau predicts that if annual net immigration continues at 800,000 per year (with an average U.S. fertility rate of 2.2, a reasonable figure in light of the higher fertility of the immigrant groups), then by the end of the coming century the U.S. population will reach 500 million—one-half the current population of China.

The authors insist that such a huge increase in population (which they both deny is happening and applaud in the same breath) will have no negative effect on the environment or the quality of life; moreover, they assure us that it is silly to worry about suburban sprawl, loss of open spaces, and impossible commuting conditions, since these things are the fruits of prosperity, *and have nothing to do with population size.* They conclude this paean to endless growth with the Panglossian remark that crowded conditions, backed-up airports, and so on "are good things . . . by any decent standard."

The trouble with this familiar plea for endless numbers of immigrants to fill the labor pool is that it does not tell us how much im-

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migration, or what kinds of immigration, are needed; in effect, their reasonable-sounding argument in favor of augmenting the labor supply for *certain* areas of the economy only serves to prop up a rhetorical embrace of more immigration *per se*.

Finally, the article insists that our immigration policies "ought not to be conceived as some kind of messianic international public service." . . [But] it is certainly a peculiar notion of manifest destiny that requires white Americans to let themselves be turned into a minority in this country in the space of a few decades, as *Time* predicts is going to happen if current immigration trends continue. Yet we must "extend, and widen, our gangplank to the world," say Messrs. Wattenberg and Zinsmeister, because America "wounds itself when it turns inward—excluding foreigners." By this reasoning, the period of relatively restricted immigration between 1921 and 1965 should have been a low point in U.S. history, but it was in fact a period of America's greatest prosperity and happiness—the high tide of the American Century.

LAWRENCE AUSTER
New York City

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

If Ben J. Wattenberg and Karl Zinsmeister had had their way, Andrew Carnegie would have stayed in Scotland. Given the point system advocated by these immigration reformers, the young, half-educated entrepreneur who founded U.S. Steel would have been told to stay home.

Though their article is well-written and carefully researched, the reforms the authors propose do not match their arguments in favor of freer immigration. . . . Thus they point to the tough, entrepreneurial spirit, self-sufficiency, and hard work of naturalized Americans and acknowledge their economic and other contributions; yet they favor a point system based on education and money that would make it harder for these very people—most of whom had little education and less money when they immigrated—*to gain entry into the land of* opportunity. As we know, there is no direct and necessary connection between education and economic success. How many fruit stands, restaurants, and groceries have been started by doctoral candidates? . . .

What the authors call "a fair and rational alternative" to current immigration policy amounts to allowing bureaucrats to custom-design the future population of the United States to meet needs which, by definition, are unknowable. Who will alert the immigration office that more entrepreneurs are needed in East St. Louis? Economic planning, even in the guise of immigration reform, cannot work and should not be tried. We cannot assess the potential value of an unskilled laborer against that of an untenured professor. One could very well start U.S. Steel, the other could very well go unhired.

All of the authors' arguments in favor of more immigration are sound. So why not advocate free and open borders?

RICHARD MINITER
American Spectator
Arlington, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Ben J. Wattenberg and Karl Zinsmeister offer sound reasoning and solid empirical data in their argument that immigration is not only not harmful, but actually beneficial to U.S. society. But just as I was expecting them to support a policy of *free* immigration, which seemed the logical direction in which their article was heading, they came up with policy prescriptions that are obstructionistic, elitist, and bureaucratic.

Reading the palms of hopeful immigrants would probably be just as accurate as the authors' point system in attempting to predict who will and who will not make it in this society. And how is "making it" even defined? Yes, it would be nice to attract immigrants with "proven financial skills and capital," as the authors put it, just as it would be nice to attract the Mother Teresas of the world. But where does one put "saintly" on a résumé, and how many points ought it to be worth on a point system?

Far better, I think, would be a policy of free immigration coupled with changes in the welfare system to ensure that immigrants are not here for a free ride, but rather to participate in and contribute to a *free and humanitarian society.*

PAUL D'ANDREA
Oak Lawn, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Immigration as a "solution" to our demographic and economic problems—as proposed by Ben J.

OVERPOPULATION IS DEVASTATING OUR ENVIRONMENT

Most Americans think of overpopulation as something that is threatening the environment in far-off countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Yet our own country is vastly overpopulated in terms of the long range carrying capacity of our environment, which we seem to be doing our level best to destroy just as rapidly as we possibly can. The root cause of environmental destruction in our own nation, as well as in other countries, is simple: too many people.

At any given level of conservation and technology, our impact on our environment is proportional to the size of our population. That is a simple, incontestable fact.

Acid rain, global warming, the thinning of the ozone layer, smog, urban crowding, traffic congestion, top soil erosion, ground water contamination and depletion, the disposal of nuclear waste, toxic waste and garbage, our vanishing farmlands and wetlands; all of these grave problems are closely linked to population size.

They all warn us that, if we truly care about saving our environment, we must take action NOW to halt, and eventually to reverse, the growth of U.S. population.

Under these conditions does it make any sense at all to continue allowing legal and illegal immigration to add nearly a MILLION MORE PEOPLE each year to our already far-too-great numbers?

Send today for our free brochure and learn why far more stringent measures than employer sanctions alone are urgently needed in order to halt ILLEGAL immigration and why we advocate a reduction in LEGAL immigration to an *overall ceiling* of 150,000 a year, *including all relatives and refugees.*

Such a ceiling would still be generous, yet would give priority, as it should, to the preservation of our environment, and to our own national interest.

NEGATIVE POPULATION GROWTH, INC.
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Wattenberg and Karl Zinsmeister—diverts attention from the real structural problems of our society and economy. We have a growing sector of our population which is failing to achieve minimal educational competence, and we are consuming rather than investing in our economic infrastructure. If we attacked these problems directly, we would succeed in ameliorating the problems discussed by Messrs. Wattenberg and Zinsmeister.

The labor shortage that they bemoan, if real, is likely to be part of the solution rather than of the problem. If we responded to the shortage with more capital investment and higher wages, we could do much to alleviate the problems of hard-core unemployment and homelessness so visible in America today.

Messrs. Wattenberg and Zinsmeister also ignore the fact that most immigrants to the U.S. end up in only a few states. California, for example, receives a large fraction (perhaps 30 percent) of the total flow, and further high immigration rates will only increase its population, which today stands at 30 million. I cannot think of any problem that California has, among which are water shortages, polluted air, and badly overstressed public services, for which more population is a solution.

The authors want an immigration rate of 900,000 per year. This rate would lead to very substantial population growth, pushing the U.S. population beyond 300 million by the year 2030. Such a vast increase in population runs directly counter to the need to deal with our rapidly mounting environmental problems. More Americans mean more pressure on our natural resource base, less attention to environmental protection, and less time to respond to shocks in the economy; in short, a more unstable economy and inevitably a lower standard of living.

No, we do not need more immigration. A sensible policy would reduce the immigration rate . . . so that the U.S. population could reach zero growth in a few decades. We would then be able to address our real social and environmental problems while maintaining an acceptable living standard for all.

DAVID A. YOUNG
Livermore, California

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Most of the arguments advanced by Ben J. Wattenberg and Karl Zinsmeister are sound, especially the one which recommends immigration based on skill, not family preference. . . . What they fail to acknowledge, however, is that too much immigration is bad for the country on environmentalist grounds. The one monumental problem that cannot be dismissed is that more people mean more of everything, like garbage, oil pollution, crowded roads, and replacement of trees by dwellings . . . .

Z. HRUZA
Astoria, New York

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

. . . Have Messrs. Wattenberg and Zinsmeister visited South Texas recently? If I may be permitted to say so, one of these small Texas towns was founded by one of my great uncles. Until fifteen or twenty years ago, it was a small town probably not greatly different from a number of other small towns that dotted America. Today, it is a town not greatly different from many that you would find in Northern Mexico. Do not stop in this or numerous towns in the area to ask directions unless you first brush up on your Spanish. . . .

To bear out my criticism that the article has not been well-researched, let me ask the following questions: what is the poverty rate of newly arrived immigrants, even those who arrived as early as a decade or two ago, as compared to the national average? What are the differences in poverty and welfare-recipiency rates, grouped according to national origin? What would have been the difference in our national income and tax receipts if we had been more selective in our immigration laws? . . .

I can anticipate the next question: how about our tradition of admitting the "huddled masses"? The fact is that the 19th-century wave of immigration . . . was one of those rare periods in history when national interest, individual self-interest, and altruism coincided. At the time our technology of mass production in basic industries required an unending amount of unskilled labor. But that is no longer the case today. . . .

VIRGIL R. COWART
Houston, Texas

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

I was delighted to see a pro-immigration article in COMMENTARY. . . . I fear, however, that the immigration policy favored by Ben J. Wattenberg and Karl Zinsmeister will come to resemble the industrial and social policies of the Left and is therefore doomed to failure.

The basic question is, how are government bureaucrats to know which kind of immigrant, or, more to the point, which kind of skills, are most important to the future well-being of the country? I do not see any salutary effects on American productivity . . . from the large-scale import of doctors or social scientists. On the contrary, the immigrants most needed are just those who would probably be refused entry in the system proposed by Messrs. Wattenberg and Zinsmeister: immigrants with nothing to offer but their love of freedom and a proclivity for sacrifice, hard work, and risk-taking.

The authors devote relatively little space to what they call the "enterprising spirit" of the kind of person ready to leave everything behind in the hope of providing a better future for his family. However, this immeasurable factor is actually the most important in evaluating the positive consequences of immigration. . . .

. . . Today, as in the past, it is from the "huddled masses" that America's great entrepreneurs and thinkers will emerge. More immigrants are needed as a source of new ideas, new challenges, new ways of seeing old problems. . . .

ROBERT GORELICK
Brussels, Belgium

BEN J. WATTENBERG and KARL ZINSMEISTER write:

To begin with, a word about numbers: all of our estimates and projections, throughout the article, are official products of either the Immigration and Naturalization Service or the Bureau of the Census. That is the most plausible, moderate, and conservative statistical base for any argument. Imagine the criticism we would be subjected to if we had chosen to use some of the other numbers floating around!

Some of the data, obviously, are only best guesses, but they are the best guesses from the nation's most expert and unbiased sources. And where a plausible range of estimates was available—as, for instance, in the Census Bureau's projections of future U.S. population under alternate scenarios—we always used the middle ("most

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likely") scenario. Lawrence Auster's figure of 500 million Americans by the end of the next century, incidentally, is what the Census Bureau calls its "highest-assumption" series, with not only immigration and fertility rates pegged at very-high-but-plausible levels, but with the additional assumption that life expectancy will be seven years longer than is estimated in the middle series.

Several respondents worry that our system of expanded meritocratic criteria might leave insufficient room for the Andrew Carnegies of the future. Let us point out that we are not talking about cutting off *low-skill immigration*. We merely want to boost sharply the number of new arrivals who bring with them the language, occupational, cultural, educational, and financial credentials that are important in a modern society. The current mix is roughly 9 percent skill-graded immigrants, 91 percent everyone else, principally relatives and refugees. Something like 50/50, we believe, would be a far more sensible mix. If this were coupled with an overall increase in legal immigration (as we suggested), it would not need to come at the expense of family or refugee preference. Several hundred thousand slots in those two categories allow ample room for low-skill entrants. Moreover, our suggested criteria include bonus points based on domestic demand for specific skills. That could easily include nannies, gardeners, tile-setters, and other unskilled or semi-skilled workers, of blue- or white-collar persuasion.

Several letters refer to fears that even moderate population growth in this country would exacerbate environmental problems. The implication of this logic is that people are a kind of pollution. In truth, the organization of a given society is overwhelmingly more important in determining the quality of the environment than the sheer number of people it contains or the rate of population growth. Pollution has gone down in the U.S. in recent years even as population was rising—because America decided to spend money on it. To take another example: East Germany has 57 percent fewer people per square mile than West Germany; moreover, East Germany has far fewer private cars, far less energy use, and far less of the various forms of consumption that environmentalists insist are the cause of ecological damage—but does anybody believe East Germany has been friendlier to nature than West Germany? Sensible conservation policies, paid for from a prosperous economy, are the critical factors in keeping environmental problems under control. The way to fight pollution is to fight pollution, not to fight people.

We set out in our article to formulate a hard-headed, balanced, and realistic immigration policy that would maximize the good effects of the historically fortunate fact that millions of people living elsewhere would like to be Americans. With nativists, environmentalists, and open-borderists all squawking at us, it seems to us that we hit it just about right.

We concluded both that immigration in some moderately higher numbers would probably be good for the United States—likely to make us wiser, richer, stronger, more universal, more globally influential, and more energetic—and that corruptions in the current system (like illegal entry, the slow rate at which criminal immigrants are deported, and a gross bias in favor of family nepotism at the expense of more meritocratic criteria) ought to be curbed to make the results even better. More immigrants. Better criteria. Both.

This is not an abstract argument; it is about straightforward national interests, and serious ones. The case against "cultural swamping," although sometimes made harshly by harsh people, is not without some real merit, and it is in recognition of such merit (as well as for solid reasons of equity) that we proposed a "European bonus." It is also why we suggested only moderate increases in immigrant acceptance.

If pro- and anti-immigrationists would each give some ground, a new policy could emerge that would reduce the cultural frictions associated with current immigration patterns, while bringing America a supply of unfathomable human riches. David A. Young calls for investment in our nation's "infrastructure." There is no better investment, at any price, than ambitious, talented, and patriotic people. Immigrants are infrastructure, Mr. Young.

Textbooks

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

In "Newspeak, Feminist-Style" [April], Robert Lerner and Stanley Rothman confuse censorship of curriculum by small groups on religious grounds with broad-based educational-reform movements which advocate a more inclusive curriculum. Although feminist groups have been active in recent curriculum-reform movements, the movement for such reform is not exclusively feminist. . . .

In 1988 the Bradley Commission on History in Schools recommended "that history can best be understood when the roles of all consitutent parts of society are included; therefore, the history of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and men and women of all classes and conditions should be integrated into historical instruction." The Bradley Commission is composed of distinguished historians including Kenneth Jackson, C. Vann Woodward, William McNeill, William E. Leuchtenburg, Diane Ravitch, and Charlotte Crabtree. The members represent varying philosophical positions, both liberal and conservative.

As the Bradley Commission statement suggests, the purpose of revising the curriculum to include women's history is not simply to add a few famous women to balance mention of men but to make visible women's past experiences and to assure that the perspectives of women are included in U.S.- and world-history courses.

SUSAN H. GROSS
Director, Upper Midwest
Women's History Center
St. Louis Park, Minnesota

TO THE EDITOR OF COMMENTARY:

Robert Lerner and Stanley Rothman are shocked (shocked!) that political influence has changed the composition of school textbooks. The only textbook I remember well . . . was my eighth-grade American history text. Though I was schooled in Central New Jersey, the textbooks we used were those approved in the South. As a result, the Civil War was the War Between the States, and the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was excoriated for being too critical of slavery. Slavery, the textbook explained, was an institution that served the needs of all engaged in it—slaves as well as slaveowners. And this was in 1966.

If political pressure brought by "liberals" has changed this situation, I for one am glad of it. . . .

In the matter of altering facts to include women as part of history, . . . I concur with the authors' views. If current textbooks are

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claiming that men and women have made equal contributions to scientific research in the past, then—Madame Curie notwithstanding—they should be criticized. And if Messrs. Lerner and Rothman are saying . . . that textbooks should show the important nurturing role women have played and continue to play, then I, as a stay-at-home mother, agree with them wholeheartedly. . . .

But why should textbooks not show men and women engaged in the same professions today? . . . My garbage collector is a woman, my dry cleaner is a woman, the only research scientist I know in my neighborhood is a woman. I take my daughter to a local fast-food restaurant frequented by army personnel so that she can see women in uniform, and I point out women police officers so that she can know that these roles are not closed to her. I never wanted to propagandize her, but I do feel that all girls and boys should have the freedom to fantasize about their future, and I will resist efforts to make her feel less significant than her male peers.

Yet even at the age of four she already believes that some roles are closed to her. A short while ago she told me that her best friend Zack was going to be a doctor when he grew up, while she was going to be a nurse. When I asked why she didn't want to be a doctor, she replied: "Because girls can't be doctors, only boys can." My four-year-old nephew has said the same thing, even though his doctor is a woman.

This is evidence of some very subtle pressure at work in society. It does not come from any of the adults who are in contact with my daughter, for I know them all and know that they don't believe women can't be doctors. But it certainly comes from somewhere, and if textbooks combat this sense of lower expectation with pictures of women—and black—doctors along with white men, then that's fine with me.

Messrs. Lerner and Rothman say that such depictions only "represent an ideal for the future," rather than present reality, . . . but haven't even the best American textbooks always done this? Go back and reread Benjamin Franklin's suggestions for American-history textbooks, and you will see that he and others of his time believed that we needed to create a gentle American myth in order to inspire the democracy they aspired to but did not fully realize. . . .

Karin Chenoweth
Silver Spring, Maryland

To the Editor of Commentary:

Robert Lerner and Stanley Rothman's article on current textbook requirements mandating that half of all the quarterbacks and prostate patients presented be women was most illuminating. The authors' interest is clearly in the relationship between these textbooks and policy. But it is worth noting, as Margarita Levin has done elsewhere, that there is another effect of the resulting discordance between textbook and reality.

Students come increasingly, and increasingly correctly, to see textbooks as nonsense. Contrary to what seems to be the belief of those who would have textbooks present the world as their ideology would like it to be, students are not brain-dead. They know perfectly well that it is overwhelmingly males who become Senators and who commit brutal murders and that it is females who more readily exhibit "parenting behavior" and who avoid mathematics in college.

What contemporary textbooks teach students is that textbooks lie. It is not an altogether bad thing that the new ideology makes so obvious the lesson that textbooks *can* lie and that they *sometimes* do. What is horrifying is that some social-science texts are so infused with misrepresentation that students are coming to believe that lying is *all* textbooks do.

Steven Goldberg
New York City.

Robert Lerner and Stanley Rothman write:

According to Susan H. Gross, fundamentalists censor but feminists merely seek to include new materials, which is acceptable because it is popular. First of all, given the inevitable limitations of space in any textbook, every act of inclusion means that something else is bound to be excluded. Also, the popularity of censorship does not change the fact that it is still censorship. Omitting the study of evolution from the school curriculum was popular at one time and in some quarters still is. Nevertheless, censorship by any other name is still censorship. There is, however, some reason to doubt that feminist curriculum changes are all that popular, for not only were they never put to any kind of vote, but we doubt that most people are even today aware of them. What feminists do want excluded from the curriculum, as Paul Vitz has documented, is the actual distribution of men and women in various roles and the likelihood of their actually displaying different character traits. They would prefer an essentially androgynous distribution of roles and character traits. An examination of the textbook guidelines adopted by several states and many publishers in the context of feminist writings on the subject shows that there really is not much difference in the means that some religious groups and feminists use to achieve their goals, except that the latter are far more politically sophisticated and therefore more successful.

American history poses a more difficult problem for would-be censors than does literature because there is the expectation that certain essentially political subjects like the Revolutionary War, the Constitutional Convention, the Civil War, the New Deal, etc. will be covered. The fact that there has never been a woman President or Vice President of the U.S., that women first became members of Congress during the Progressive era, that the first woman cabinet member took office during the New Deal, and that the first woman appointed to the Supreme Court was appointed by President Reagan, places limitations on the kinds of coverage of women that can be expected, given the limited amount of time available to teach a high-school survey of American history. We are sure that including a textual insert in each chapter lamenting the "sexism" of the era, while one way to achieve coverage of women's issues, is not a good way to teach American history. This is because it is an anachronistic attempt to impose current values on past personages, values they probably didn't share. Our favorite example of feminist bias in a well-known American-history textbook, the 1982 edition of Todd and Curti's *The Rise of the American Nation*, is its grouping of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment with the rest of the Bill of Rights. Off to the side and in fine print, the text describes the ERA as a proposed amendment and not part of the Constitution, but any student who didn't look at the notes wouldn't know this. Anyway, why should a

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reference section include proposed amendments as opposed to the actual Constitution? We are sadly familiar with the idea of loosely construing the Constitution, but this is ridiculous.

It is difficult to know exactly how to respond to Karin Chenoweth, for her letter is not entirely coherent. On the one hand, she is sensitive to the dangers of censorship and critical of earlier efforts to censor textbooks, but on the other hand, she states that the best textbooks should represent a future ideal. Unfortunately, she seems to feel that "two wrongs make a right" when they really don't. That textbooks have been censored in the past does not justify current efforts. Adjustments of the truth, even to create the "gentle American myth" that Franklin purportedly advocated for the purpose of promoting an ideal democracy, whatever this exactly means, are always dangerous to the cause of telling the truth, no matter how unpleasant it may be. Even a "noble lie," if it is in fact a "noble" lie, is still a lie, no matter how sensitive it may be. We're glad that Karin Chenoweth knows many women engaged in all manner of professional activities, but we feel constrained to point out that the majority of research scientists, especially in the "harder" fields, are men (in 1980, according to the National Science Foundation, 98 percent of engineers, 88 percent of physicists, and 81 percent of mathematicians were male). Also, her four-year-old is rather too young to have been affected by even elementary-school texts.

As Steven Goldberg notes in his thoughtful letter, the grave pedagogic danger of such proportional representation is that it is willfully untrue. In effect, as Mr. Goldberg points out, it is a form of lying. The problem is not so much that students will be deceived, although this is a problem, but that once they find out they have been lied to, they will become cynical about education and the capacity of educational authorities to tell the truth. Then their minds will have truly become closed—in a manner more effective than even Allan Bloom may have imagined.

Interpreting the Bible

To the Editor of Commentary:

When Robert Alter wrote "Interpreting the Bible" [March], on the Jewish Publication Society's Torah commentaries, I was at a loss to respond to his discussion of my commentary on Numbers. After all, how could one respond to a review devoted almost exclusively to contesting one oblique point, a theological justification of King Saul in 1 Samuel 15 (not Numbers!), that comprises one-third of one page in a 600-page commentary? But when Mr. Alter subsequently attributes to me a statement I neither wrote nor implied, it is time to answer.

In a letter to the editor [June], Marc Brettler comes to my defense (on this point) by stating, what is obvious to every novitiate in biblical research, that biblical historiography is frequently rooted in ideological polemics. Mr. Alter counters as follows: "What I mainly objected to in Jacob Milgrom's reading was the pseudo-scientific assumption that ideological or institutional background is *necessarily the decisive element* in determining the meaning of the text" (emphasis added). This allegation is false. I neither wrote nor intimated it. My commentary gives ample testimony to multiple exegetical techniques (especially the literary one which Mr. Alter espouses), but on this one point I conjecture: "[I]t may in fact be" that an ideological motivation best fits the evidence.

It is precisely because I devote myself, at times extensively, to literary issues that I feel personally deprived. Considering Mr. Alter's vast literary talents and accomplishments, he might have enriched me and his readers had he in fact written an incisive and comprehensive critical review.

Jacob Milgrom
Hebrew University
Jerusalem, Israel

To the Editor of Commentary:

In the June letters section your correspondent Ludwig Seligsberger is quite right in rejecting the rendering "dolphin" for the Hebrew *taḥash* in Exodus 24:4 *et al.* The meaning was already lost in rabbinic times, for the talmudic tractate Shabbat 28b identified the term with the mythical unicorn. Certainly, "dugong" is more likely. In my forthcoming Jewish Publication Society commentary on Exodus I cite the highly plausible suggestion of Professor Hayyim Tadmor that *taḥash* is to be connected with the Akkadian *taḫ-ši-a*, the name of a precious stone of either yellow or orange color. The word is used in that language to describe leather that is dyed the color of the stone.

Nahum M. Sarna
Jewish Publication Society
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Robert Alter writes:

My observations on Jacob Milgrom's commentary were by no means "devoted almost exclusively to contesting one oblique point." I drew attention to a number of different aspects of his commentary (its copiousness, its use of Hebrew exegetes, its intricate knowledge of cultic lore, its philological insights), and I duly noted its virtues. At the same time, I was troubled by certain unexamined assumptions informing the Milgrom volume, for all its "multiple exegetical techniques," and in that regard his explanation of 1 Samuel 15 seemed to me not an "oblique point" but a symptomatic statement worth scrutinizing.

Jacob Milgrom cites one phrase he used that indicates tentativeness. But the very paragraph in which it occurs is studded with unqualified assertions of purportedly historical fact on the most debatable issues: "[T]hese texts stem from a Davidide (that is, anti-Saulide) author"—thus is scholarly conjecture promoted to a flesh-and-blood historical figure with a confidently known politics and assured authorship. "There is, therefore, no reason to doubt Saul's statement that 'the troops spared the choicest of the sheep and the oxen for sacrificing to the Lord your god'"—though both Meir Sternberg and I have adduced a whole set of rhetorical, structural, lexical, and grammatical reasons for doubting the sincerity of Saul's statement. And at the end of the paragraph: "[I]t is only the tendenz of the anti-Saulide writer who misrepresents Saul's valid execution of the *ḥerem* as an act of heresy"—that is, the anti-Saulide writer, set up as pure postulate, has a political agenda that explains everything in the story which might contradict Mr. Milgrom's reading of it. The formulation "it is only" is reminiscent of phrases sometimes used as well by Nahum M. Sarna, implying, as I observed critically in my article, that there is a single hidden key that solves the "crux" or puzzle of the biblical text. That is a fundamental assumption, I felt, that ought to be challenged, for all that is admirable in the new Jewish Publication Society Torah commentary.

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The American 80's

Disaster or Triumph?

A Symposium

COMMENTARY *recently sent the following inquiry to a number of American intellectuals of varying political views:*

The 80's are more and more coming to be characterized by journalists, historians, and intellectuals as a costly if not a disastrous decade for America. At home, it is charged, the economic and social policies of the Reagan administration stimulated greed on Wall Street and in the business community, encouraged a general mood of selfishness, and were responsible for an actual increase of poverty (as symbolized in particular by the plight of the homeless). Abroad, the indictment continues, indiscriminate bellicosity on a global scale succeeded mainly in provoking a dangerous arms race, needlessly exacerbating and prolonging conflicts with adversaries, alienating friends, and sowing the seeds of future mistrust of American intentions.

Do you accept these characterizations? If so, how would you account for the worldwide triumph by the end of the decade of the prevailing ideas and policies of the American 80's? If not, how do you account for the fact that so many people in America itself have been condemning those ideas and policies?

The responses—nineteen in all—follow.

This symposium is sponsored by the Harry Elson COMMENTARY *Fund.*

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Jeane J. Kirkpatrick: Will history give Ronald Reagan credit for his accomplishments?, I have been asked many times by relatively nonpolitical American Reagan supporters.

COMMENTARY's symposium reminds us that there is a more basic question: will the very existence of these accomplishments be acknowledged, or will they be ignored and obscured by an interpretation of events that jumps from Jimmy Carter's human-rights policy to Carter monitoring elections in Nicaragua in 1990; or from the end of negotiations on SALT II to George Bush signing a new START treaty?

Will the collapse of Communism be ascribed simply to internal Soviet weaknesses—as if U.S. and Western policies played no significant role?

All this could happen. The writing of history is the job of a largely adversary professoriate and a largely adversary media, not much affected by the events of the past year.

It is possible that the collapse of Communism as a world revolutionary movement, its elimination as a framework for the critical analysis of capitalism and as an alternative focus of loyalty, may eventually have an effect on the relationship of the American Left with the United States, but I doubt it. I believe the Left's attitudes toward America have influenced its attitudes toward Communism, rather than the reverse. These attitudes toward the United States are deeply rooted, and shielded from evidence because they are not based on evidence.

I believe one of the distinctive attributes of the American Left is a broad, though not universal, alienation from the dominant American society and culture which constitutes a cognitive screen through which new information about the world must pass before it is assimilated. This creates the negative evaluation of the 80's confronted in this symposium.

WHAT kind of alienation am I talking about? An example at hand is in a recent column by William Pfaff on Canada in the *International Herald Tribune*. He writes:

> We shot up our West—murdered the Indians, overgrazed and overplowed the land into dust. Now we are de-treeing it. You sent your Redcoats to police and bring order to the West, singing—we were led to suppose—a neat baritone while going about it. How impressive to have won the West your way.

This excerpt (part of a longer equally prejudiced and prejudicial comparison) has no special significance. But it is typical of the tendency on the Left to sweeping condemnation of U.S. national character and practices and the easy praise of others.

Let me be clear. I understand that not everyone on the American Left is alienated from the United States. Like all broad political movements the American Left contains a number of potentially incompatible tendencies. Traditional Democrats, including many blacks and most of the labor movement, are not alienated from America. There are also some fairly traditional Marxists and quasi-Marxists for whom alienation is not central. But there are also denizens of the counterculture who contribute to the American Left a broad streak of romanticism, anarchism, and alienation largely missing from the serious social-democratic and Communist parties of Europe (though this streak has surfaced in Germany's "Greens" and on the edges of Britain's Labor party).

The anti-establishment, anti-bourgeois romantic Left has had in common with democratic-socialist and major Marxist parties the rejection of capitalism. But serious socialists reject capitalism because they think socialism can provide a better life and a higher standard of living for more people, not because they reject bourgeois styles of life or are contemptuous of bourgeois values. Persons whose politics are motivated chiefly by the desire to promote the best life for the most people change their minds and their policies on the basis of new evidence, and in recent years, many democratic-socialist parties and some non-democratic ones have abandoned key socialist policies in favor of market strategies on the basis of accumulating evidence of socialism's failure and capitalism's economic success. But the American Left has had special problems assimilating these facts.

I believe the reason is that many have been attracted to socialism less as an economic system that would work than as a system which disdained capitalism and capitalist society.

I believe they disdain capitalism for much the same reason they disdain John Wayne and Ronald Reagan—because it seems so American. Americans like Horatio Alger, the American dream, the homely virtues, the promise of reward for hard work. The heroes of the counterculture also work hard and live by the rules—and lose their farms to greedy bankers who divert depositors' funds to support Ronald Reagan and his ilk. In this world of the counterculture, the good guys are all anti-establishment. Economics becomes a subfield in an ongoing morality play. In that morality play it matters less that socialists are unproductive than that they are anti-capitalist.

THE SOCIOLOGIST Seymour Martin Lipset has recently described the process by which one Western country after another has abandoned key socialist strategies after their economies floundered, and adopted market mechanisms instead. But not American Democrats. In attempting to explain why "the national Democrats have been more disposed to adhere to a redistributionist, progressive tax, anti-business orientation than most social-democratic parties elsewhere," Lipset returns—as I think we must—to the thesis of

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Richard Hofstadter and Lionel Trilling that for American intellectuals, "the attachment [to Marxism] has been inspired and sustained more by a desire to be anti-establishment, to be adversarial toward bourgeois and national patriotic values, than by a concern to implement specific political and social programs." I rebel, therefore I am.

These aspects of the American Left's relationship to its society are present in speeches at Democratic conventions and in Democratic primaries: the America they depict is one of debt and depression, of decline, homelessness, and hopelessness, of insecurity and intolerance, of neglected children and neglected aged. Ronald Reagan's America—as they depict it—is a callous, careless society with polluted air and water and drug-ridden, violent cities in which the homeless are left to freeze on winter streets. It is an America of greed and need.

This crime-ridden America projects its lawlessness abroad. It is described as the "world's biggest deadbeat," as a great "international lawbreaker." At the Democratic convention of 1988, Ronald Reagan's administrations were decried as irresponsible in economic policy, callous in social policy, and trigger-happy in foreign policy.

Do I exaggerate? No. They exaggerate.

The alienation of the American Left is manifest in the eager magnification of American failings and the reluctance to acknowledge American achievements. It is clear in the enthusiasm for such interesting "rights" as flag burning and in the eager condemnation of such "crimes" as John Poindexter's. This alienation is nowhere more obvious than in the tendency to blame America first—for almost everything almost anywhere. It has cost the national Democrats votes and has been recognized by that party as a problem.

How can people who see the American economy in terms of depression, deficit, and decline accept the news that others find it the most promising system of all?

How can people who believed Ronald Reagan's description of the Soviet Union as an "Evil Empire" to be dangerous and ludicrous accept the news from people who lived under it that it *was* a repressive regime in which alien rule was sustained by force?

How can they bear the pain of learning definitively that Eastern-bloc socialism had never won the allegiance of those who lived under it? Only by denial. Suddenly, all the old arguments have been settled: virtually no one chooses to live under Communism. Given a chance, people choose free governments and free markets. The speed with which Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia seized the opportunity to dump Communism and Communist rulers, transform their regimes, and loosen ties to the Warsaw Pact resolved once and for all the outstanding questions about whether those people of Eastern Europe had "chosen" socialism.

Worse, from the point of view of the Left, must be the widely acknowledged failure of socialist strategies even in a democratic context and the subsequent abandonment of central planning, redistributionist tax policies, and systems of comprehensive social insurance. "From Scandinavia to the South Pacific, socialist and other left-wing parties have taken the road back to capitalism," writes Lipset.

This decision to travel "the road back" from socialism to capitalism rests on three conclusions—each of which contradicts central aspects of Marxist and quasi-Marxist perspectives: first, that socialism is an inefficient, unproductive economic system; second, that capitalism is a more effective, more productive system; and third, that it is possible to "go backward" in history. Of all these, I think the news most difficult for the American Left has been capitalism's success, because accepting it means conceding *America*'s success. It means conceding that the Left got it all wrong: *in fact* there was *no* increase in poverty, *no* sudden explosion of greed, *no* adventurism in foreign policy, *no* increased misery of the poor in the 80's.

There *was* a dramatic increase in drug addiction and in certain kinds of social ills for which the counterculture and liberal extremists bear a special resposibility. Homelessness is the very best example of an ill dramatically exacerbated by "liberals" who push out of mental hospitals those too sick to remember to take the medicine that makes them relatively sane, and who keep in the streets in the name of freedom people who have long since become slaves to addiction.

The alienated leftists make it clear day after day that they would rather curse the society than help the people in it cope. Only recently, for example, the New York *Times* reported new findings concerning the biological basis of addiction which, it said, "will result in an entirely new strategy for fighting drug addiction." One might have thought this good news, but no. . . .

"I object to seeing the vulnerability in the person rather than in their poverty," said a University of Colorado sociologist, apparently unmoved by the prospective good the new medicine might do. "Even if the scientific evidence turns out to be strong, people have the right to refuse being tested or given medication," added the director of an "advocacy group for the mentally ill," less concerned about the misery than the "right" to be ill.

Our homeless problem does reflect a failure of Ronald Reagan: his failure to solve the problem of "liberal" extremism which is ready to sacrifice persons to abstractions.

It matters that there are influential, highly educated Americans who think that the United

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States is a cold, careless society in debt and decline. But their views are not a conclusion based on evidence, and thus cannot be disproved by evidence. Too bad, because the evidence is now so abundantly at hand.

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Robert B. Reich: How can the decade just ended exemplify both the failure of American capitalism and, simultaneously, the triumph of American capitalism? There are two plausible explanations. The second is more convincing.

1. The warts-and-all hypothesis. For all its obvious shortcomings, American capitalism is still so superior to Communism that it will dramatically improve the lives of Eastern Europeans, Soviets, and others around the world nonetheless, and they know it.

Yes, certain blemishes were revealed during the last decade. American productivity has risen at a snail's pace; the nation went from being the largest creditor to being the largest debtor in the world; it has lost market share in many of the technologies of the future; American companies are being bought up by non-Americans; the average real income of Americans has stagnated; American schools are falling apart, aptitude tests are down, and one out of every five young American adults is functionally illiterate; the rates of infant mortality in many of America's major cities rival those of Third World nations; and a growing portion of the American population—including one out of every four children under the age of six—is impoverished, at least according to the way Americans define poverty.

But these are quibbles. In the world economy, everything is relative. During the same decade, Communist systems fared much worse. In fact, the gap between the two systems—American-style capitalism, and Soviet-style central planning—became so wide that the latter could not endure.

The relative collapse of central planning was due largely to new demands placed on all economic systems by rapidly changing information technologies. Central planning is up to the task of producing masses of identical objects, like steel ingots. Indeed, Soviet steel production increased by a brisk 9 percent a year between 1945 and 1960—enabling Nikita Khrushchev credibly to boast in 1959 that at the rate his economy was growing the Soviets would overtake America within twenty years. But when it comes to smaller runs of more intricate things that must be carefully synchronized with one another and continuously adapted to new opportunities and circumstances, central planning is hopeless. Bureaucratic coordination is impossible; there are too many variables. For designing and producing networks of computers, software, semiconductors, and fiber optics, and utilizing them to accomplish all sorts of tasks, there is no substitute for a decentralized price system that constantly signals how and where new ideas can be put to their best uses.

2. The it's-not-American-capitalism-they-want-anyway hypothesis. Granted all of the above about the inevitable failure of central planning, there are capitalist alternatives other than the American Way. And the record of the 80's suggests that the alternatives might be superior.

If you happen to live near Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, or Singapore you are probably considering adopting some variant on their highly successful forms of neo-mercantilist capitalism. To this end, take the following measures: hold down consumption; push exports; subsidize high technologies; pour huge amounts of money into education, training, and research and development; avoid the bureaucratic inefficiencies of central planning but keep some of its scale economies by consolidating your firms into giant industrial groups, each with its own lead bank; keep everyone on his toes by forcing the groups to compete vigorously with one another; but also create among your business, labor, and government elites a tight coordinating system, so that whoever loses from economic change can quickly compensate whoever wins. Most importantly, don't be overly enamored of the price system. Use it to signal growth opportunities, but then rapidly mobilize the nation's resources to capture them.

If you live near Western Europe, on the other hand, you're probably considering adopting social-democratic capitalism. Western European productivity soared throughout the 80's, and the anticipated gain from economic union in 1992 has summoned a deluge of global capital. How to institute social-democratic capitalism? Easy: rely on free markets, but establish public health insurance and generous unemployment insurance; set up a highly progressive income tax; give organized labor a major say in corporate governance; have your big banks, labor unions, and finance ministries steer macroeconomic policy; so long as a strong social safety net is in place, tolerate unemployment for the sake of rapid productivity growth; pool public and private resources for major research-and-development projects; invest heavily in public works; provide workers with an abundance of apprenticeship, training, and retraining programs, and help them find jobs and relocate themselves. Also, consider sacrificing some political sovereignty in order to create economic opportunities that originate across your borders.

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None of this is meant to suggest that the average Pole, Hungarian, Russian, Vietnamese, or Thai is carefully weighing and balancing these possibilities. Their overwhelming desire, presumably, is to get food on their tables and VCR's on their television sets, and they care little about what the economic system is called or exactly how it is run. The point, rather, is that the alternative to central planning is not necessarily American capitalism. Those who are emerging from Communism are more likely to be attracted by a wartless variety.

If the recent past is any guide, it can be expected that the future ideological battleground will not be between Communism and capitalism, but among these three fundamentally different kinds of capitalism: East Asian neo-mercantilist, European social-democratic, and American. If they stick to their paths and we stick to ours, the differences between the American kind and the others are likely to be far greater by the year 2000 than they are today, and the relative unpopularity of our errant variety, far more apparent.

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George Gilder: Free at last! Let us rejoice at the end of the 80's. Even as I write, a cleansing wave of retrospective rage sweeps through the media at the greed and venality, jingoism and philistinism that emerged in America with the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency. A wave of euphoria engulfs us as Americans celebrate more inspiring leaders, leftist leaders—*Time*'s Man of the Decade Mikhail Gorbachev and the media's man of the millennium Nelson Mandela.

Mandela opens the 90's by proclaiming his creed of racial harmony from Yankee Stadium to the U.S. Congress, hailing such pacific prophets as Yasir Arafat, Muammar Qaddafi, the PLO, the IRA, and the Puerto Rican redeemers who shot four U.S. Congressmen in 1955. In contrast to the bellicose Reagan, Gorbachev now pursues a policy of peace, raising defense spending by 20 percent as a share of Soviet output (from 10 to 12 percent of GNP).

Free at last! The American intelligentsia now revels in the prospect of higher taxes and higher spending and looks longingly toward environmental catastrophe. Taxes will bring a new spirit of "equal sacrifice" to our "plutocratic" and "undertaxed" nation in which government now spends a "niggling" one-third of GNP (without the help of socialized medicine that balloons the totals of other Western nations). Environmental disasters will put politicians (and intellectuals) back into control once and for all, and end the business bid for primacy in our national life.

Crime rates, too, seem likely to improve soon, as the clogged court system prepares to end "wilding" sprees in Washington and New York through the incarceration of John Poindexter and Michael Milken. Faced with the threat to public health and safety posed by these men, the government refreshingly eschewed the folderol of specific criminal charges and is putting these men away merely as symbols of 80's excess.

Now in the 90's, the U.S. can turn away from the "sterile" conflicts of the cold war and focus instead on the real threats to America—Israel and Japan. In a bold response to the threat of high-quality Japanese imports, the U.S. has already moved to dissuade the Japanese from working more than forty hours a week. Perhaps in time the Israelis can be persuaded to stop defending themselves and the West from terrorism so effectively, as this distresses potential American allies such as Iran, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Cuba, and Uganda.

IT IS easy to make fun of the fashionable attitudes toward the 80's. But the question remains: why does the memory of the past decade make all these highbrows ache and furrow and the media mouths froth and sneer? The reason is obvious. For most of the American intelligentsia, the 80's were nearly a total disaster.

The 80's were the era when the leftist dreams all collapsed in travesty. The mock-heroic youth of the 60's emerged from schools full of self-importance, sure that the world was evil and owed them a living for their moral superiority, and capable of making no contribution to society except teaching their crippling creeds to future generations. The 80's taught them the unwanted lesson that Marxist slogans, a sense of grievance, and a rhetoric of rights are economically useless. Disdainful of science, enterprise, and other practical learning, they moved into law, teaching, and politics. Incapable of performing any useful task for a business, they thronged into the environmental movement where they could harass businesses from a moral pinnacle without submitting to the humbling discipline of serving customers. The youth of the 60's crowded onto the pulpits of the media and the academy in such numbers that a reporter or professor made less money than a garbage man. Seething at such obvious inequities of capitalism, they castigated the prosperous for "greed" and "workaholism."

The 80's were the decade when socialism died and left nothing but a bristling carcass of weapons pointed toward the West. It was the decade when tax rates were cut in 55 nations and revenues

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dropped only in nations that raised their rates. It was the era when capitalism at last demonstrated conclusively its superiority as an economic system. It was the era when U.S. economic growth rates, long lagging behind the rest of the world, surged ahead of Europe, Africa, and Latin America, and nearly caught up with Japan's for the first time since the early 50's.

The 80's also saw the longest peacetime expansion on record, continuing today, with the highest rates of investment in capital equipment and the highest rates of manufacturing productivity growth of any postwar recovery. During the 80's, the U.S. increased its share of global manufacturing output, global exports, and global GNP. Contrary to thousands of reports to the contrary, U.S. balance sheets mostly improved, with debt as a share of assets dropping drastically for both businesses and households, as equity and real-estate values rose far more rapidly than indebtedness. Even government debt, as a share of GNP or in relation to real national assets, remained modest by historic and international standards.

After tax-rate reductions in the early 80's took effect in 1983 and 1984, revenues rose some 9 percent a year in real terms, far faster than during the high-tax 70's. During the 80's recovery, industrial output rose nearly 40 percent, personal income 20 percent, and all segments of American society benefited from the creation of 22 million new jobs at rising real wages. Black employment rose 30.3 percent and Hispanic employment nearly 50 percent.

WHY then all the gloom-mongering? Chiefly because by the critical indices of marital stability, which is what mostly matters, the 80's brought tragedy to millions of American families and their children. Contrary to all the claims of the Left, female-headed families are mostly a disaster, incapable of disciplining boys or of escaping poverty. Poverty, however, is not the key problem. Census figures showed that the poorest Americans spent some three times more money than they reported as income. Their problem was not chiefly monetary but a breakdown of the moral codes of civilized society.

Although not economic in nature, this persistent problem of family breakdown cast a pall of failure on all the economic triumphs of the 80's. Both sought and desired by the Left as a form of liberation, family breakdown accounted for most of the crime, drug, and other "poverty" problems widely blamed on Reagan policy. Without paternal discipline and role models, teenage boys run amok in nearly all societies.

Most of all, family dissolution was crucial to the single greatest propaganda triumph of the Left since the Great Depression: the homeless who haunt all the proud towers of 80's prosperity. Like the Great Depression, which was caused by massive tax and tariff hikes, the homeless problem is a harvest of failed government policies: favoring divorce and illegitimacy over marriage, deinstitutionalizing the mentally ill, rescinding vagrancy laws, and stifling cheap housing with regulations, codes, and controls. But in the morbid feedback loops of liberalism, the answer is always more government subsidies for homelessness and family breakdown and thus more propaganda for the enemies of America. As the most gullible of Americans, many intellectuals blamed the homeless on the capitalist successes of the 80's.

A MORE BASIC reason so many intellectuals resent the 80's is that they uphold an adversary culture, and the decade saw the triumph of mainstream values. American intellectuals prefer socialist regimes where intellectuals seem to rule rather than an America where power and status accrue chiefly to the providers of useful goods and services to others. Many intellectuals prefer a so-called "society of poets" where most people live in fear and famine (Nicaragua or Cuba) to a society where capitalists surpass intellectuals in income and status.

This preference of the intellectuals became obvious in the debates over taxes. Objectively the debate should be over and the Left in rout. It was predicted in Congress that the Reagan tax cuts would reduce the share of real taxes paid by the "rich"—those earning over $200,000—to 7.8 percent of total income-tax receipts; the same was predicted for the relatively poor, those earning under $15,000. Instead, by 1987 (the latest available detailed data), payments by the rich had soared to nearly 20 percent of all income-tax revenues and payments by the poor plummeted to 2.8 percent. As supply-siders predicted, the rich did pay a lower share of their incomes than previously, but they earned and declared *more* income, thus increasing both their absolute and proportionate tax contribution. This healthy and desirable result, which meant that American elites were working harder and investing more effectively, makes the *New Republic*, Kevin Phillips, and other levelers seethe.

In the long run, it is impossible to get more money out of the rich unless they earn and produce more. More rich people and more production are the essence of economic growth, which is indispensable both to any enduring improvement of the lot of the poor or any enduring increase in government revenues.

The fact is that people in America with enough gumption to work hard and keep their families intact thrived during the 80's. The share of all families with real incomes over $50,000 rose from 20 percent to 26 percent and the share earning more than $35,000 rose from 41 percent to 46 percent.

In capitalism, the rich and well-off usually deserve their money, not as a prize for virtue or a celebration of consumption, but for their superiority as investors. Capitalism works because peo-

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ple who demonstrate their ability to create wealth also win the right to reinvest it. The experience of the 80's around the world showed the effectiveness of this system both in increasing government revenues and expanding opportunity and mobility for the poor.

High tax rates do nothing to stop people from being rich; if you are already rich, you can always manipulate your funds and properties in ways that avoid taxation. British aristocrats and Swedish tycoons have demonstrated this for decades. High tax rates, however, are very effective in preventing poor and middle-class people from getting rich by working harder and more resourcefully than the classes above them. Thus these high rates impoverish entire societies. The 80's forced the leftist intellectuals to make clear that they prefer equally distributed poverty to the enriching inequalities of capitalism.

THE greatest triumph of the 80's, however, was not fully evident in any economic data. It was the computer revolution, entirely a product of relentless discipline and creative genius in capitalist nations. Computer-industry revenues more than quadrupled, unit sales rose by a factor of hundreds, and computer cost effectiveness rose ten-thousandfold. At the end of the decade, U.S. companies still hold some two-thirds of the world market, and in critical software and leading-edge microchips their market share is above 70 percent and growing. In particular, the U.S. leads in using personal computers, with well over half of the world's 100 million PC's located in the U.S. in 1990. The U.S. has three times as much computer power per capita as the Japanese.

This development, which impelled most of the world's economic growth during the decade, was also disastrous for the Left. The Left has always pinned its hopes on politics. The converging technologies of computers and telecommunications are radically reducing the power of politicians. An ever-increasing share of world wealth assumes the mobile form of information technologies which, unlike the massive industrial systems of the past, are difficult to measure, capture, or tax. The computer age is an age of mind, elusive and hard to control. This ascent of mind is devaluing all the entrenchments of material resources and geography within the ken and command of politicians. As Gorbachev himself has observed, the computer revolution was critical to the crisis of Communism: "We were among the last to understand that in the age of information sciences the most valuable asset is knowledge, springing from human imagination and creativity. We will be paying for our mistake for many years to come."

Perhaps Gorbachev was the leftist most visibly shaken by the experience of the 80's. But all suffered a similar discomfiture and few enjoyed it. In the coming decade, politicians will fight back with an array of seductive appeals to intellectuals. Obsolete notions of national autonomy and self-determination—favoring the ruling elites and bureaucracies against the forces of global capitalism—will ring out at the UN, in every trade-policy forum, and on every campus. Using trade-gap data that are meaningless in an information age, politicians will try to divide business with protectionist demagoguery against Japanese rivals. "Balanced trade" will never again be seen on earth, and it can be pursued only by a globally impoverishing expansion of government power over international flows of goods and investments. A key issue for the future of America is which side the intellectuals will now take: the side of materialist envy and political prejudice, or the side of opportunity and intellect.

In the conflict between matter and mind, the euphoria of the 90's poses a real threat to the U.S. no less serious than cold-war Communism. Abetted by nihilist and terrorist forces lashing out against the wealth they can neither earn nor produce, and exploiting the vast destructive powers of modern weaponry, the enemies of civilization are more dangerous than ever. Of all the Western nations, only Israel fully comprehends this menace and is appropriately resolute and resourceful in resisting it. Thus the new socialist assault, with its nihilist edge, will often target Israel as the world's leading obstacle to "peace." Israel's ability to resist these pressures ironically will depend on its own capacity to transcend the socialist forces within its own borders that have turned what should be one of the world's most prosperous nations into a dependent of American charity.

In the 90's, intellectuals must understand that the reason to defend free societies is not their legal rectitude in international disputes or any obsolete shibboleth of national self-determination in little despotic satrapies around the globe. The reason to defend free nations is their role as the capitalist bearers of civilization and human progress, freedom and technology, in a world that will sink into unspeakable horror without their leadership.

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Paul Berman: The characterization of American failures in the 80's offered by the editors of COMMENTARY seems to me excessively mild. For it's not just that Wall Street has gone piratical and that buccaneers have looted the savings-and-loan (S & L) banks and that the 80's turn out to have been, as ought to be noted,

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probably the most corrupt business decade in American history. Government, too, has descended further into corruption than at any time in living memory. Nor is it just that, in regard to foreign affairs, American bellicosity has had a bad effect on national interests. The election of the Reagan administration at the start of the decade produced horrific massacres in El Salvador, not without CIA complicity, and led to the first death squads in Honduras. In Nicaragua, tens of thousands of people have been killed as a result of our policies, and for no purpose that would not better have been served by following the peaceful advice of that sagacious social democrat, Oscar Arias of Costa Rica—whose own administration was, by the way, shamelessly undercut and subverted by White House shenanigans during the period in question. So there has been a mortal cost as well as costs that are moral and monetary.

There has been a cost to democracy in Washington itself, since the 80's were marked by still another major Republican political scandal (after McCarthyism and Watergate), showing once again how, in America, the greatest threat to liberty comes from fanaticism of the Right. On a national scale, the 80's have seen such a cheapening of electoral debate that Eastern European democrats, when they picture the kind of political life they would like to encourage, make a point of citing the recent American elections as the sort of failing that ought to be avoided. And all of these developments have come on top of a shift of wealth so vast and undemocratic that, as the editors correctly remind us through a quiet reference to homelessness, walking to work in a city like New York means stepping over the diseased addicted bodies of the most abject persons that anyone can imagine.

How to account, then, for "the worldwide triumph . . . of the prevailing ideas and policies of the American 80's"? The question is delusionary. It is like the stuttering airplane passenger in Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* who flaps his arms every time his plane rushes down the runway, and after take-off turns to his seat-mate and says: "Wowoworks every time." Yes, the federal budget grew amid a lot of rhetoric affirming otherwise; social welfare was diminished; law, conscience, justice, and Congress were flouted; wars were fanned. And sure enough, some happy events soon occurred, namely, the world democracy movement, the collapse of Communism plus that of two or three fascistic dictatorships on the Right. But the prior existence of A does not indicate a causal relation to B.

In one respect, though, a broad if not exactly worldwide "triumph" of the "prevailing ideas and policies of the American 80's" may indeed have occurred. There has been a public-relations triumph. In many parts of the world, something called "Reaganism" has come to be admired. This can be explained by two factors. The United States still plays an emancipatory role in many parts of the world and especially in Europe—the role that was described most powerfully by Henry Adams a century ago. Morally you might suppose that the American ideal would long ago have drowned in seas of blood and injustice. But the ideal is unsinkable; not even the worst and most reactionary of decades can overwhelm it. The thing bobs back into view, and people look at America from far distances and keep noticing that political liberty and individual freedom and the possibility of self-improvement are not the ideological mirages that sometimes they are said to be—no matter how grim may be America's other problems. And since those faraway people cannot easily distinguish between the ancient American ideal and a given ephemeral administration or era, they are likely to assign to that ideal whatever name appears most current. If some recent elections had gone a little differently, that name might well have been "Carterism," "Mondaleism," or "Dukakisism."

Instead "Reaganism" enjoys a wide vogue. (No one will ever speak of "Bushism"; a man requires character to become a doctrine.) But apart from an identification with America, what does Reaganism ("the prevailing ideas and policies of the American 80's") mean? In this country, Reaganism means, I would say: laissez-faire and supply-side economics, diminished social welfare, diminished concern for the rights of minorities, militarism, anti-Communist bombast, religion (especially fundamentalism), cultural conservatism, and a populist tolerance of such tendencies as the anti-Darwin movement in education. Reaganism's meaning abroad is not the same. An Eastern European who uses the term is likely to have in mind "liberalism" in the European sense (market economics, secularism, enlightenment)—combined with sympathy for American styles that belong more to the Left than to the Right. An Eastern European "Reaganite" might well favor unregulated market economics, bebop, rock-and-roll, and "We Shall Overcome" as an all-purpose anthem. The students of Prague, who tend to admire Ronald Reagan personally, sang precisely that non-Reaganite song in Czech and in English as they marched through the streets on the day that the 1989 revolution broke out.

If we are to bandy about the relative triumphs of American decades, I would argue, in fact, for the radical 60's, whose global successes would make a fine theme for a further symposium. The role of the American (and Anglo-American) 60's in spreading democratic ideas turns out to have been enormous. Anyone can verify that by walking past the scruffy idealistic guitar-twangers of Prague's Wenceslas Square. The enduring popularity of certain aspects of 60's radicalism, stripped of some political and chemical errors of that era,

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may prove to be one of the main ways in which America's emancipatory role continues to be performed. Imagine! (Lyrics from "Imagine," the radical utopian song by John Lennon, are anti-Communist graffiti in Prague. And why not?) Of course, in the matter of decades, the principal credit for the miraculous events of 1989 still belongs to the 1770's and 1780's. History moves a lot slower than we have sometimes thought it would.

The editors of COMMENTARY have addressed the right issues, but they have put these issues cart foremost. They speak of the failings of the American 80's as a debatable point ("Do you accept these characterizations?"). But they speak of the "worldwide triumph" of the "prevailing ideas and policies" of that decade as a simple reality. This reversing of the debatable and the factual is an example, I think, of the American habit of dousing ourselves with celebratory champagne in order not to notice the evidence of capitalist horrors that sprawls nightly across our own doorsteps. Even so, the editors' question has the virtue of at least noticing, if only to dismiss its significance, a possible contrast between American failings and successes. That contrast has always been the great tragedy of our national life. If today there has been in some respect an American triumph (no matter whether we ascribe that success to the American 80's or to other, grander, more radical factors), the contrast, therefore the tragedy, is only the greater. What are we going to do about that?

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Charles Murray: Did the Reagan administration sponsor a culture of greed and selfishness? *Is* there a culture of greed and selfishness? Oddly, the answer to the first question is "yes, to some extent," even though the answer to the second is probably "not really."

Kevin Phillips has handed up the most unrelenting indictment of the Reagan administration in his recent book, *The Politics of Rich and Poor.* Much as I disagree with his economic analysis, I think Phillips is right about the political ambiance. The Reagan administration often seemed grandly indifferent to the ethics of limited government.

My own exposure to this indifference involved the policy debates about poverty, welfare, and the underclass. There were bright spots. The second echelon of officials included some people who thought deeply and cared passionately about these problems. Sometimes they managed to get the right paragraph into a presidential speech; sometimes they managed to get the right provision into a legislative proposal. At the cabinet level, William J. Bennett was a splendid exception, doing for the educational debate what needed doing for the welfare debate. But the dominant impression conveyed by the Reagan White House was that an expanding economy would minimize poverty, the social safety net would handle the residual problems, and that the best way to cut the domestic budget was by getting rid of all that fraud and waste in programs like Medicaid and food stamps. When it came right down to it, one suspected, the top people in the administration didn't lie awake nights worrying about the poor.

This would not have been so bad—people who lie awake nights worrying about the poor have done much mischief—except that the indifference coexisted with the Reagan administration's failure to confront the central standard of fairness involved in reducing the size of government: what's sauce for the goose also must be sauce for the gander.

Take, for example, the administration's attitude toward cutting the budget. Large sums of money can be cut from the domestic side of the budget if one is willing to yank the middle class and the corporations from their many federal teats, politics be damned. In Reagan's first term, several idealistic officials in the administration were eager to do just that. They were largely rebuffed, however, either by more senior officials in the administration or by Congress. They needed leadership from the top. Only Ronald Reagan had the stature and the podium to articulate a coherent program for cutting domestic spending in which everyone would lose some of his special privileges, but the payoff would be balanced budgets, less intrusive government, and simpler, fairer rules for everyone. He didn't give that leadership. The implied message was that the Reagan administration was comfortable with government benefits if they went to the right people.

The S & L fiasco is another example of the way in which the administration exhibited the ethical carelessness that lends credibility to the greed-and-selfishness indictment. The blame for the fiasco is complicated and diffuse, much of it antedating 1981. But a bedrock principle of Reaganism (as I understand Reaganism) is that people must bear the consequences of their actions. Giving S & L lenders license to make risky loans without incurring commensurate risk themselves should have caused instant consternation in every administration official who understood the specifics of the deregulation. Apparently it didn't. Whatever the excuses, the result was that the Reagan administration permitted precisely the same error—government-created incentives for irresponsible behavior—concerning affluent S & L bankers that it regarded with such horror when it saw criminals let off without punishment, teenage girls rewarded

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for having babies, or students given diplomas without having to study.

So I will not defend the Reagan administration against accusations that it encouraged an "I'm all right, Jack" mentality that in turn encouraged greed and selfishness. That said, it still remains unclear to me how much real effect this mentality had on the nation, and how much of the hoopla about the greed and selfishness of the 80's described a reality. In this brief commentary, I will limit myself to two observations.

The first is that you can't have sustained, sizable economic growth without producing something very like the phenomena that have gotten journalists so upset about greed and selfishness. Economic growth means that a lot of people get rich. When people get rich, some of them are going to buy fancy new houses and splashy jewelry and big boats. A look back in American history reminds one of the late 19th-century Gilded Age, the Roaring 20's, or the post-World War II prosperity that prompted Vance Packard to write *The Status Seekers*. Kevin Phillips refers to this conspicuous consumption as the "capitalist blowout" and sees it as something that could have been prevented. I'm not convinced. If you want exuberant economic growth, you're also going to get *nouveaux riches* and buccaneers and con artists and splendiferous camp followers as part of the package. It is one thing to argue that this will eventually produce a political counter-swing (which might well be true), and another to say that it was a product of public policy.

Preventing such effects in the 80's would have been especially difficult because of the increasing size of the economic base. Measured in proportional terms, growth in Gross National Product from the end of the recession in 1983 to Reagan's last year in 1988 has been matched by many other episodes in American history. But as the base gets larger, even modest percentage increases in GNP can produce unprecedented raw quantities of new wealth. The increase in just the five years from 1983 to 1988 was larger than the increase during the entire three decades from 1870 to 1900 that constituted the Gilded Age. It was larger than the increase from 1900 through the next three decades, to the peak of the boom in 1929. And by "larger," I refer to per-capita changes in real GNP, controlling for both inflation and population size.

The 80's were also exceptional in terms of the size of the newly affluent population. This is no place for a lengthy analysis of income distribution, but this fundamental fact about the Reagan years has been obscured by the rhetoric about the rich getting richer at the expense of the poor: using the most basic government data on distribution of wealth, money income of households, constant 1988 dollars, and the Bureau of the Census's breakdown into nine income brackets, the proportion of households in *every* income bracket up to $35,000 *decreased* during the Reagan years. The proportion in the low-income brackets (up to $14,999) decreased from 29.4 to 27.3 percent of households from 1980 to 1988, while the proportion in the working- to middle-income brackets (from $15,000–$34,999) decreased from 37.5 to 34.6 percent.

This simple set of facts leaves much to be debated. It may be argued that the proportions of people in the lowest brackets decreased trivially, for example, or that the improvements reflect an increase in two-income families, not increases in wages. On the other side, it may be argued that household-income figures, which include welfare households, understate the true improvement among families who remained in the labor market. But it cannot be argued that during the Reagan years the poor got poorer or even that working-class households got poorer. They didn't. They got somewhat less poor, though not dramatically so. Meanwhile, the big change occurred in the income brackets from $50,000 on up, which increased from 15.8 percent of households to 20.8 percent. This translates into a remarkable 6.3 million new households who moved above the $50,000 level during the Reagan years. It seems reasonable to infer that this newly prosperous group contributed to an atmosphere in which people seemed to be unusually preoccupied with material possessions. Affluent readers of this article may remind themselves of their spending behavior when they first found themselves in possession of discretionary income, even if that happy event occurred before the selfish and greedy 80's.

In sum: the Reagan boom involved the creation of widespread wealth and sometimes great wealth, accompanied by the predictable side-effects. Radically redistributionist tax policies could have prevented these effects, but also would surely have killed the economic growth.

My second observation is that the behaviors that get in the newspapers don't necessarily have much to do with the day-to-day life of most people. Even given the large numbers of people who became more prosperous during the 80's, and granting that some of them behaved as the tabloids breathlessly describe, it is not obvious that many people behaved in ways that fit the stereotype. My question (I don't have the answer) is this: what proportion of the American population experienced at first hand an increase in greed and selfishness, either in themselves or their neighbors, in the 80's? Maybe my experience is atypical, but somehow I missed out. For me, the 80's were the polar opposite of the image of the decade, a time for sinking roots and thinking more, not less, about obligations to family and community. As I mentally run down my list of friends, I can think of one couple who became noticeably more prosperous during the 80's but they along with all the

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others seem to have gotten less acquisitive, less self-absorbed, more concerned with others during the supposedly greedy and selfish decade.

There is a catch in this exercise, of course: I was in my forties for most of the decade, and so were most of my friends. I suggest that one final reason the decade was so commonly characterized as acquisitive and self-absorbed is that the Baby Boomers weren't in their forties like me, but in their thirties. It is not a novel argument, but it bears repeating: ever since the 60's, the Baby Boomers have defined the decade's *Zeitgeist*—rebellion in the 60's (the modal Baby Boomers were in their teens), narcissism in the 70's (they were in their twenties), and acquisitiveness in the 80's (they were in their thirties). I'm at a loss to explain precisely why this bulge in the population distribution so decisively affects the popular culture—they comprise only a modest proportion of the total population—but they have had that effect for three decades and there is no reason to think it will change during the next three.

Even as I write, the modal Baby Boomer is approaching his fortieth birthday and the characteristic attitudes of middle age. One may, therefore, confidently predict that no matter what happens in the White House, the 90's will be a decade that celebrates family and community and traditional values. The *Zeitgeist* will change, and commentators on the culture will need to have explanations. Presidents are convenient for this purpose. (Could any presidential couple be a more convenient explanation for a return to family values than the quintessentially Dad-like George Bush and Mom-like Barbara Bush?) But that will not tell us how much American life has really changed, or how much the Bush administration has had to do with it—just as it is not clear how much American life changed during the 80's, or how much the Beverly Hills Reagans had to do with it.

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Christopher Lasch: The collapse of Communism represents a victory, of sorts, for the West—but not much of a victory for the United States and certainly not for the "prevailing ideas and policies of the American 80's." The real winners, as everybody knows, are the West Germans and the Japanese, who owe their power and prosperity to a combination of circumstances having nothing to do with the "policies of the American 80's." While the United States and the Soviet Union were exhausting themselves in the production of armaments, West Germany and Japan, unburdened by competition in the arms race, rebuilt their shattered economies and cultivated the arts of peace. Unlike the United States, those countries learned something from the devastating experiences of the 30's and 40's. Whereas Americans learned only the dangers of "appeasement," the West Germans and Japanese made a serious attempt to come to terms with their recent past. They gave up atavistic dreams of imperial conquest and racial destiny. Having been drawn more reluctantly into the modern world than other industrial nations, they embraced modernity, after World War II, with the enthusiasm of converts. They invested heavily in the modernization of infrastructure, replaced technologies geared to mass production with technologies geared to production for specialized markets, perfected first-rate systems of education that assured a trained and disciplined work force, built up an efficient civil service, and taxed their citizens in order to maintain elaborate health and welfare services. They drew on traditions of solidarity and collective discipline, inherited from the pre-modern past, and put them to work in the service of enlightened, secular objectives—peace, prosperity, health, social welfare.

These are not very exalted goals, and the success of West Germany and Japan illustrates not only the benefits of successful modernization but the price paid in the form of spiritual shallowness and a shallow concept of democracy—one that stresses the equitable distribution of material comforts rather than the character-forming effects of civic participation. But the point is that the "ideas and policies of the American 80's" do not explain the success of West Germany and Japan or the revolutions in Eastern Europe. It is presumably the West German model, not the American or Soviet model, that attracts the populations of Eastern Europe, together with the prospect of membership in a European community that will give economically backward nations access to the benefits of development. Many people in Eastern Europe still think of the United States, no doubt, as a land of fabulous wealth; but further exposure will correct that impression and teach them to regard America as an example, if anything, of social and economic stagnation. A country that lacks many of the social services and amenities taken for granted in other advanced-industrial countries—national health insurance, good schools, efficient systems of public transportation, civic order—is unlikely to serve as a model or inspiration for Eastern Europe.

NONE of this is meant to deny that the collapse of the Soviet empire adds up to a diplomatic, military, and ideological victory for the West and even, in a limited sense, for the United States. Many years ago, George Kennan held out the hope that containment would eventually lead to the "breakup or mellowing of Soviet power." He turns out to have been right: the United States forced the Soviet Union into an arms race that

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has wrecked its economy, perpetuated a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy, and retarded the development of democratic institutions. Gorbachev's resignation from the cold war is an admission of defeat, no doubt about it. It is above all an ideological defeat. Socialism can no longer claim to be the wave of the future. The hope that sustained a generation of leftists—that "actually existing socialism" would evolve toward "socialism with a human face," while social-democratic regimes in the West would move toward a more thoroughgoing form of socialism—has suffered a blow from which it is not likely to recover. The removal of the socialist alternative from political debate (at least in its classic form) will have profound effects both in the East and in the West.

Still, it is too much to claim a victory for the type of free-market ideology promoted by Thatcher and Reagan. Britain and the United States are declining powers, and the privatization of public services has not only failed to arrest their decline but contributed to it. The ideological victory, if there is one, belongs to proponents of the "mixed economy" we used to hear so much about in the 50's and 60's. That we don't hear much about the "mixed economy" today does not mean that it has disappeared, only that American liberals have lost control of the political agenda. Elsewhere in the industrial world, it remains the dominant polity—uninspiring though it may be.

THE victory of the West, then, is not a victory for the free-market ideology that seeks to privatize everything in sight. Nor is it a vindication of American diplomacy, except in a highly provisional sense. We are witnessing the mellowing and possibly the breakup of Soviet power, but these developments may lead to destabilizing effects we will come to regret. In any case, we have already paid a heavy price for anything we can be said to have won. The containment policy, as critics pointed out from the beginning, required the creation of a global network of client states; and the need to sustain its credibility as the protector of those clients forced the United States into police actions, and finally into the disastrous war in Vietnam, that were inconsistent with its national interests. The cold war, moreover, caused serious distortions in the American economy. Military spending created jobs and promoted economic growth in the short run, but in the long run it deflected investment from plant expansion and modernization, making the United States weak in exports and more and more vulnerable to imports.

Besides undermining America's position in world markets, the cold war brought about an institutional interpenetration of the corporations, government, and universities. It thus contributed to the centralization of economic and political power and widened the gap between the affluent, heavily subsidized sector of the American economy, which rests on technologies originally developed in connection with national defense, and the impoverished, technologically backward sector for which public subsidies are unavailable. The flexible technologies required by advanced societies—technologies compatible with decentralized control over production, a high degree of workers' skill and initiative, and efficient use of energy (as opposed to heavy reliance on nonrenewable resources)—are not the kind of technologies that were encouraged by an economy based on the production of weapons. At a time when our competitors were beginning to perfect more sophisticated technologies, the defense economy forced the United States to adopt technologies suited only for mass production—technologies that enforced a rigid separation between the design and the execution of work, eradicated every vestige of workers' control, and left the work force demoralized and apathetic.

Preoccupation with external affairs, during the long years of the cold war, led to the neglect of domestic reforms, even of basic services. Medical services, public health, and education are notoriously backward in this country. In the matter of education, the most dramatic instance of American decline, obsession with the Soviet threat led to ill-conceived reforms designed to educate a scientific elite, at the expense of an intelligent, enterprising, and politically knowledgeable work force. Here again, the Soviet threat proved to be far less serious than the economic threat from nations that understood the importance of education and rapidly outstripped both superpowers in the quality of their schools.

TO LIST all the bad effects of the cold war would take more space than I have here. The development of a secret police, the erosion of civil liberties, the stifling of political debate in the interest of bipartisan consensus, the concentration of decision-making in the executive branch, the sheer growth of the executive and its declining accountability, the secrecy surrounding executive actions, the lying that has come to be accepted as routine in American politics—all these things derive either directly or indirectly from the cold war. Their worst effect has been to undermine confidence in government, to weaken our public culture, and to destroy the delicate fabric of trust on which civic life depends. If the West can be said to have won the cold war, the United States can hardly be said to have shared in the fruits of that victory. It would be closer to the truth to say that in the course of their long rivalry, the Soviet Union and the United States have destroyed each other as major powers, just as many critics of the cold war predicted. No doubt we have a long way to go before we reach Soviet levels of economic inefficiency, political apathy and cynicism, and bureaucratic

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intrigue; but that is pretty clearly the road we are traveling. We can rejoice that Eastern Europe has been delivered from Soviet control. For ourselves, however, there is little to celebrate.

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Joseph Epstein: Ronald Reagan is the first Republican I ever voted for for President, and I did it not once but twice. In 1976 I voted for Jimmy Carter, the man who should go down in history as the first President to use a blow dryer in the White House, but I couldn't bring myself to do it a second time. A photograph of Carter, collapsed while jogging, weak in the knees, held up by secret-service men, provided a symbolism I felt I could not ignore. A collapsed jogger with a hot-comb hairdo and a big smile—that seemed to me precisely the condition of the United States under the man who preferred to be called Jimmy.

I am not at all sorry about having voted for Ronald Reagan, except perhaps only for the fact that having done so prevented me from scoring some fairly easy jokes off him. He made, let us face it, an easy target. A former and not particularly adept actor, a man entirely without intellectual interests or even pretensions (though consistently grammatical and well-spoken), married to a woman who seemed a damned icy little proposition—plenty of room here for the expression of casual contempt. Acquaintances, not under the burden of having voted for Reagan, were regularly telling me how "stupid" he was. "What," I used to say in defense of my man, "has intelligence got to do with running the United States?"

That, I now realize, was only a half-joke. I don't know how intelligent Ronald Reagan may be, though in ways that matter he is, in my view, more intelligent than either his predecessor (a graduate of Annapolis) or the man who succeeded him (Yale, Phi Beta Kappa). More important than intelligence, Reagan had, I think, correct beliefs. He believed (rightly) that the United States was slipping badly in almost every regard; he believed (again rightly) that Americans had lost confidence in themselves as a nation; he believed (bingo!) that Communism was no good thing and therefore was not to be encouraged by weakness or accorded undue respect; and he believed (more dubiously) that a common-sense approach could solve most contemporary problems. Ronald Reagan not only believed these things but he believed them deeply and absolutely, and, given the state of demoralization of the nation at large when he came into office, it was a good and useful thing that he did so believe them.

MOST journalists, however, saw it quite differently. *The Worst Years of Our Lives* is how Barbara Ehrenreich, a heavy contributor to *Mother Jones* and *Ms.*, titles her recent book of essays on the Reagan years; "Irreverent Notes from a Decade of Greed" runs her subtitle. Miss Ehrenreich bangs down on the melodeon of clichés with thick fingers. She blames Ronald Reagan for everything short of earthquakes that she doesn't like in the United States. In her introduction, she tells us that her father, who has Alzheimer's disease, when asked, as a test of mental competency, who was President of the country, would snort back, "Reagan, that dumb son of a bitch." The little vegetables in nouvelle cuisine seem to Miss Ehrenreich the last word in decadence. *Yuppie* is a word that, in her moral lexicon, is right up there with *fascist*. With the thick-fingered method, you never have to worry about missing a note; this is accomplished by hitting all the keys at once:

> Greed, the ancient lubricant of commerce, was declared a wholesome stimulant [during the Reagan years]. Nancy Reagan observed the deep recession of '82 and '83 by redecorating the White House, and continued with this Marie Antoinette theme while advising the underprivileged, the alienated, and the addicted to "say no." Young people, mindful of their elders' Wall Street capers, abandoned the study of useful things for finance banking and other occupations derived, ultimately, from three-card monte. While the poor donned plastic outerware and cardboard coverings, the affluent ran nearly naked through the streets, working off power meals of goat cheese, walnut oil, and crème fraîche.

Bet you didn't know that you had lived through such hellish times. But, then, at *Ms.* and *Mother Jones* the tendency is not to accentuate the positive.

Barbara Ehrenreich's clichés are not restricted to her or to her favorite publications. When it comes to writing about the Reagan years, most journalists sidle up to the melodeon. Here, for a notable example, is the New York *Times* columnist Russell Baker, bemoaning the increased expense of life on Nantucket, where he has had a summer home for more than twenty years: "During the Reagan years the island experienced an onset of decamillionaires; that is, people so rich they could spend a million dollars decorating a house that in 1965 might have sold for $25,000." A tricky business complaining about the wealth of others, especially when one has one of the better jobs in journalism and a few best-sellers under one's own belt. But let that pass. The larger point is that the chief clichés about the Reagan years,

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which are now beginning to harden, have to do with unexampled greed: decamillionaires jogging off their nouvelle cuisine while chewing up the countryside.

Or consider the Yuppie, the principal cliché villain of the 80's (though one heard a bit less about him as the decade drew to its close). "It's one of those goddamn Yuppie restaurants," was a sentence I seem often to have heard during the 80's. "The Yuppies have moved in and wrecked the neighborhood," was another. So widespread was the contempt connected with the term that it wasn't easy to find anyone ready to own up to being one, though they were usually readily enough spotted: a Yuppie was generally the other fellow. And yet what was so heinous about being a Yuppie? If the Yuppies can be said truly to have existed, then they were young men and women who worked twelve- and fourteen-hour days in order to indulge their penchant for designer clothes, BMW's and Saab's, gorgeous grub, and minor appliances. The world, surely, has known worse villains, yet the Yuppie, as a social type, a real Reagan phenomenon, could certainly get people worked up into a frenzy. Perhaps it was because they weren't as spiritual as you and I—or at least I.

Even though I twice voted for Ronald Reagan, I am not one of those decamillionaires, or even close to a unimillionaire. I drove into the 80's in a 1978 Chevy Malibu and drove out of the decade in a 1988 Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera. Not much evidence of taking advantage of such things as oil-depletion allowances and leveraged buyouts here. During these years, my taxes seemed regularly to go up, my expenses never down. Two children in private universities kept me typing much faster than I thought I could. At least I never felt the need to jog, having spent so much of the decade, financially, running in place. No doubt I was not well-positioned to take advantage of the famous greed of the 80's. But then, those of us mired in the middle class are used to finding ourselves just there, smack in the middle—and where better to feel the squeeze?

Yet I am far from certain that I, and people in similar conditions, would have fared better under a Democratic presidency. Certainly we didn't under the effable Jimmy Carter. I have the most limited economic knowledge, but I am, at least in a general way, for reducing government spending, not out of any high principle but mainly because, in my experience, it is almost invariably inefficient spending. But whenever the Reagan administration attempted to reduce federal spending, out came the journalistic clichés. Two of the great cliché phrases invoked endlessly during the Reagan years were "savage cuts," which the administration was supposed to be attempting in all realms but that of defense—and "savage cuts," as everyone surely knows, result in (all together now) "chilling effects." When, for example, the Reagan administration was confronted with the awkward fact that a great many people were forfeiting on repayment of their federal student loans, and consequently made student aid of this kind more difficult to obtain and to evade repaying, a chorus of journalistic shock went up over these "savage cuts," which could only have (how did you guess?) "chilling effects." You would think that once, just once, the writers on the New York *Times* would discover a chilling cut that had a savage effect, but if they ever did I missed it.

The paramount economic cliché about the Reagan years is that under Reagan's economic policies only the rich got richer. Kevin Phillips, who is usually advertised as writing from a conservative standpoint, recently reiterated this cliché in the New York *Times Magazine*, writing: "It was the truly wealthy, more than anyone else, who flourished under Reagan." Phillips adds: "Meanwhile, everyone knew there was pain in society's lower ranks, from laid-off steelworkers to foreclosed farmers. A disproportionate number of female, black, Hispanic, and young Americans lost ground in the 1980's, despite the progress of upscale minorities in each category." Now, doing a turn on this cliché by reversing it, *Forbes* went to a putatively liberal Harvard economist named Lawrence Lindsey, who reports that, in his view, owing to the Reagan tax cuts, the budget will be balanced by the middle of the 1990's and the American economy will be generating enormous surpluses. Even more tax cuts are required, according to Professor Lindsey, "to preserve the incentive and to avoid giving the politicians money for pork." So there you have it: a conservative announces that everything bad you have ever heard about the Reagan economic policies is true, and a liberal reports something like the reverse. What's a simple-minded fellow in a 1988 Olds Cutlass Ciera to think?

From behind the tilt wheel and tinted glass of that Olds, it begins to look as if economists of all shades of political opinion are not that smart. "If You're So Smart, How Come You Ain't Rich!" is the subtitle of an essay by Donald N. McCloskey ("The Limits of Expertise," *American Scholar*, Summer 1988) that discusses, in an amusing and penetrating way, the extreme limits of the predictive powers of economists. (Some economists, it is true, are rich, but generally from giving advice and not from taking their own.) Along with not being very good at predicting the economy, economists are not especially good at describing it, either, which makes it very difficult to know what is going on at any moment. On this morning's radio news, for example, I learned two perfectly and typically contradictory economic facts: that the American economy continues to show expansion and that the consumer confidence index is well down. Go, as they say, figure.

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Again from my windshield's-eye view, it strikes me that Reagan's economic policies were successful at reducing inflation and unemployment, neither a small thing. As for these same policies encouraging unprecedented greed, I suspect that there is no act of greed without plenty of precedent. Moreover, I was interested to read in George Russell's recent "Trashing Wall Street" (COMMENTARY, July 1990) that it was a Democratic Congress that paved the way for the great junk-bond fiasco by passing legislation freeing S & L institutions to invest in high-risk enterprises. Reagan's economic policy is blamed, too, for the creation of the homeless. AIDS is also often blamed on what are felt to be Reagan's rotten economic priorities. Dubious stuff, but then, as they used to say in the 60's, if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. All such accusations, though, it seems to me, lend to policy a greater prestige, and reality, than it perhaps merits.

Permit me here to bring in my own rather drab experience, this with government policy over a good portion of the past decade in the arts. In 1984 I was nominated by the Reagan White House to be a member, for a six-year-term, of something called the National Council of the National Endowment for the Arts. The Council, which meets quarterly, is an advisory group to the Endowment and its chairman, and for the most part discusses past and present and plans for future policy. Everyone currently on the Council is either a Reagan or Bush appointee, which, one would think, might make them conservative in outlook. Not quite so. A *clichémeister* such as Robert Brustein might write, in the *New Republic*, of "Reagan's thin-lipped dismissal of the arts" (as opposed, one wonders, to whose fat-lipped acceptance?), but in fact the arts budget grew consistently during the Reagan years, and the spirit of the Council, as it was when I first joined it, remains preponderantly liberal. Most members have never met a work of art they didn't like, and such policy as the Council creates, such public positions as it takes, tend to be very far from anything anyone would be likely to describe as conservative. Such, then, is the policy-enforcing power of modern Presidents.

IF ENFORCING policy in one's own country is a tough enough job in a democracy, obviously it is even more difficult to estimate the effect of one's foreign policy on other nations. And yet there is small doubt that United States foreign policy under Ronald Reagan—and insofar as this same policy was continued under George Bush—had a good deal to do with the astonishing collapse of several Eastern European Communist regimes. A less intransigent-sounding foreign policy than Reagan's would, I suspect, have delayed this collapse, might even have postponed it indefinitely. In Central America, similarly, a less hostile policy toward the Sandinistas on our part would likely have put off for years the free election that removed the Sandinista government from power at the behest of the Nicaraguan people.

Liberal journalists used to get a hardy laugh out of what they felt was Ronald Reagan's archaic, not to say troglodytic, anti-Communism, making many a smug little joke about his view of the Soviet Union as the "Evil Empire." But as everyone now knows—and ought to have known all along—the people who were forced to live under Soviet rule viewed it essentially as Ronald Reagan did. Reagan's foreign policy, by keeping up a high degree of pressure on the Soviet Union and other Communist regimes, and by its implicit encouragement of the hopes of adversaries forced to live under these regimes, contributed greatly to the devastation of this, yes, "Evil Empire." There are many other reasons, in my less than perfectly disinterested view, for feeling good about having voted for Ronald Reagan, but this is surely chief among them.

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John B. Judis: As a political era, the 80's began in the 70's, if not earlier—as a response to the antiwar and civil-rights movements, the slowdown of the American economy, and the decline of American power overseas. The reaction reached a climax in Ronald Reagan's first term and then began to dissipate, though not to disappear. We are still in the 80's.

The reaction was fundamentally conservative, rooted in a kind of imperial nostalgia—a sense that the United States, once the unchallenged leader of world capitalism, was in decline, and that to halt, if not reverse, that decline, it was necessary to go back to what had worked in the past, ranging from free-market individualism and the virtue of the Founding Fathers to cold-war preparedness and the sexual mores of Muncie.

In politics, the reaction first emerged in Barry Goldwater's and George Wallace's 1964 presidential campaigns. Its political success—meaning its ability to forge a majority coalition of Republicans and erstwhile Democrats—depended on two factors: first, the growing racial backlash among white Southern and urban working-class Democrats; second, the transformation by conservative politicians and intellectuals of 50's-style radical rightism into a majority, governing philosophy.

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By the last two years of the Carter administration, the reaction already dominated politics and policy. Just as liberals took charge of the Nixon administration's domestic agenda, conservatives called the tune in the Carter administration's last years. Carter's tax reform became a capital-gains cut; labor-law reform was defeated; and the airlines were deregulated. Even on foreign policy, Carter, by 1980, had capitulated to his conservative critics: he shelved SALT II, and his projected military budget increases from FY 1981 through 1985 were comparable to those achieved during the Reagan administration.

Reagan carried these conservative initiatives forward and added some of his own—appointing a judiciary opposed to the post-1964 civil-rights rulings and removing restraints on S & L's and mergers—but his primary innovations were ideological rather than substantive. Where Carter had come to stand for American defeat, Reagan stood for the possibility of victory—whether over the Soviet Union or scarce oil supplies. In years to come, Reagan's first term and the 1984 "morning in America" election will be seen as a kind of ideological Indian summer—the final time in which American goodness and purity would be highlighted against the shadow of the "Evil Empire" to the east. Indeed, by 1986, Reagan and Secretary of State George Shultz had sharply turned course on foreign policy and were steering America out of the cold war and—to that extent—out of the 80's.

How one evaluates this era of conservative reaction depends on how one defines its objectives. For instance, if one sees the U.S. in the late 70's as having fallen woefully behind the Soviet Union militarily and strategically, if one sees Western Europe as having been on the verge of "Finlandization," and if one's primary goal was to remove this looming Soviet threat, then the program of conservative reaction was an enormous success, and the 80's a time of American triumph.

On the other hand, if one believes that in 1979 the window of strategic vulnerability was a canard and that the Soviet Union posed little threat to the U.S. and Western Europe, then, from a standpoint of American national security, much of the military buildup of the early 80's was wasted. What it may have accomplished was to accelerate the collapse of Soviet Communism and of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and to speed the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. If this is so, then the buildup did benefit peoples under the Soviet thumb. This is a signal achievement, but its direct benefit to Americans is highly debatable.

This is particularly true if one's measure of success is economic and social. By this measure, the period from 1971 through the present has been one of decline and disintegration, particularly in the 80's. From 1980 to 1988, the U.S. share of world exports in automobiles dropped 46 percent, computers 36 percent, microelectronics 26 percent, and machine tools 17 percent. In 1980, the U.S. controlled 60 percent of the world market in semiconductors; by 1988, it controlled 38 percent and the Japanese 50 percent. As the political scientist Chalmers Johnson has remarked, the Soviet Union lost the cold war, but Japan won it.

Decline in these industries means that the American standard of living will sink as American workers are stuck with the less productive and lower-paying jobs within the international division of labor. If the decline continues, America will have the same relation economically to Japan and Germany that Britain or even Brazil has at present to the U.S. And the U.S. will become like Manhattan writ large, divided between a wealthy, parasitic banking class, beholden to foreign capital, and an increasingly unemployed and unemployable working class.

This decline would have occurred no matter who won the elections in 1980 and 1984. It is based less on immediate policies than on broader structural factors. As microelectronic-era manufacturing has required greater capital and long-term planning, the U.S. has been at a disadvantage because of the historic antagonism between industry and government. Japan and Western Europe have used government-industry consortia to pull even with or ahead of the U.S. in chip manufacturing, high-speed railroads, and now even commercial aircraft.

As manufacturing and services have required greater education and teamwork, U.S. industry has also been hampered by frayed relations between capital and labor and by a deteriorating educational system. In the 80's, for instance, U.S. automakers discovered belatedly that the secret of Japan's auto-making success was not its robots, but its greater reliance on team production and worker innovation.

In addition, the U.S., as the leader of world capitalism after World War II, incurred military and economic obligations that forced it to divert scarce fiscal and scientific resources to the military and to adhere to the canons of free trade even while other countries ignored them. Japan's meteoric rise from 1965 to 1971 was largely due to demand created by the Vietnam war and to its protectionist trade and industrial strategies.

Thus, considerable damage had already been done by the late 70's, when conservative policies began to prevail, but there is no question that these policies—the hostility toward government, the attitude toward labor exemplified by the reaction to the air-traffic-controllers' strike, the neglect of the human and physical infrastructure, the increase in military spending, and the refusal to protect vital American industries—reinforced these structural causes of economic decline. In his

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book *Trading Places*, former Reagan-administration Commerce Department official Clyde V. Prestowitz, Jr. offers eloquent testimony to how the Reagan administration's blind adherence to free trade allowed the U.S. semiconductor industry—perhaps the most important industry of the 21st century—to be gutted by the Japanese "dumping" chips at below cost in the U.S. market.

In addition, the Reagan administration contributed to an ongoing fiscal crisis that has severely limited government's ability to boost economic growth. On one side of the ledger, the administration not only increased military spending, but through its reckless deregulatory policies, laid the foundation for the multibillion-dollar S & L bailout; on the other side, its crusade against government has encouraged opposition—to the point of paranoia—to any tax increases. Even if the Bush administration wanted to undertake a significant public-works or educational program, it would have difficulty doing so.

During the 80's, the only bright spot in economic policy came because either massive political pressure or the imperatives of the cold war overrode the government's commitment to laissez-faire economics. This occurred during the Carter administration's bailout of Chrysler, which saved the company and made money for the government, and the Reagan administration's belated funding of Sematech, a semiconductor consortium in Austin, Texas. But as the cold war has ended, conservatives in the Bush administration have abandoned any effort to protect and foster key American industries. In economic policy, the Bush administration is probably more conservative than the Reagan administration. (The Bush administration's policy-makers, looking at Eastern Europe, even interpret the collapse of totalitarian planning as a victory for Friedmanite economics—a mistake that the Western Europeans and the Japanese are unlikely to make.)

During this era, liberal Democrats have not presented a viable alternative to conservative reaction, but have in effect either justified it or been part of it. In the 70's, for instance, liberal jurists, backed by civil-rights organizations, virtually invited a white backlash by pressing for busing as a means of school integration. Liberal economic programs, like the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Bill, conceived of the state as a gigantic version of the post office, dispensing jobs to the unemployed. With few exceptions, liberal policy on trade, foreign investment, and multinationals was the same as conservative policy. In 1984 and 1988, for instance, there were no significant differences between the presidential candidates on these issues.

As the U.S. enters the 90's, it is necessary to move beyond both the liberalism of the 60's and the conservatism of the 80's. In economic policy, it will be important to recognize that the U.S. is no longer the unchallenged leader of world capitalism and, in important respects, has fallen behind both the Japanese and Germans. As the U.S. did in the 19th century and as the Japanese did after World War II, America will have to use the power of government to protect and nourish key industries—not so much to be number one, but simply to be part of the action in the most advanced industrial sectors. If the U.S. doesn't do this—if it allows its economic future to be dictated by financial speculators or foreign lobbyists—it will continue to decline.

In foreign policy, the U.S. must begin reconceptualizing its role in the world. Crucial to this, of course, is the recognition that economics has once more become primary—not only in relation to former adversaries, but also in relation to Latin American countries whose debt to U.S. banks has imperiled our trade balance. In the 80's, America's share of Latin America markets increased but its total exports dropped precipitously. If American exports to Latin America during the 80's had increased at the same rate as they had increased for the prior three decades, the U.S. would not have had a trade deficit.

The U.S. will also have to recognize that America's alliances will shift—that it may well become in America's interest to strengthen rather than weaken the Soviet Union as a counterweight internationally to Germany and Japan and to promote stability through aid in those regions where traditional ethnic rivalries, if allowed to fester, could return the world to the situation it faced in 1914. The Bush administration, to its credit, has moved in this direction, sometimes over opposition from both liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans.

For the purpose of this symposium, however, the most important point is that if the program of conservative reaction did confer benefits upon the U.S. and the world, these have now been entirely exhausted. There is no longer any reason whatsoever for seeking the destruction of the Soviet Union. On the contrary, the U.S. now has a distinct interest in preventing the Soviet Union from descending into chaos. Nor is there any reason to continue deregulating business and finance and defunding American inner cities. The question for the next decades will not be how to get government off people's backs, but how to use it so that Americans can once more stand straight.

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Charles Horner: The 80's, it is true, did indeed end with a bang of anti-Americanism even louder than the usual thumping of the American intelligentsia. To be fair, however, New York City was its epicenter, and those who live not quite so close to ground zero were perhaps less perturbed. New York is the headquarters for only one kind of anti-Americanism, which blames the system. There is another traditional critique of the country, which blames individuals. The meaning of redemption in the two cases is radically different, for one is Marxist, the other Christian. Both partake of a persistent theme of our history—the juxtaposition of the country's noble goals and our inherent personal unworthiness. And there is much more in our cultural and religious tradition which warns of the pitfalls of too much wealth, power, and glory.

One cannot blame the Left for its sputtering and near-hysteria at the end of the 80's. It had been a tough decade for the Left, its worst ever. At home and abroad, in economics and politics, in strategy and diplomacy, the Left had been dispersed and wholly discredited. And there is worse to come. The Soviet government's embrace of the Right's traditional reading of Soviet history and practice was bad enough. Once the archives of the former Communist satellites begin to yield their assorted facts, even the worst of "right-wing anti-Communist paranoia" will come to appear as sweet naiveté.

Though the Left has thus been routed, it still retains its hegemony in matters cultural, so it is natural to expect a redoubling of its efforts there. And ironically—or better yet, dialectically—it is all possible because 80's capitalist intrigues brought about the further embedding of the leftist view of things in the great telecommunications-amplification machinery in New York, and in the now relatively few publications/communications/entertainment combines that really matter. Growing economic concentration and monopolization in this sector—the result of 80's "greed," junk bonds, insider trading, and whatnot—have placed the Left in firm control, ideologically speaking, of these enormous combines.

The Left also benefited from the good fortune that Reaganesque "greed" produced elsewhere. The universities, the foundations, and other places which generate the ideas that trickle down, or up, into the plebeian culture, were all enriched by the Reagan, now Bush, bull market. It increased endowments and incomes enormously. The Left is now camped out in its version of Bohemian Grove, not quite clear about how or why it has become unimaginably rich, but knowing only that it deserves to be, and is thus all the more able to be spoiled, self-indulgent, and dissociated from reality in the blessed way of those who do not have to work.

Yet it is not obvious what any of this means. Even more than the rest of America, those sectors of society which sustain the Left became rich indeed. But as all the novels remind us, just because you're rich doesn't mean you're happy. Is this An American Tragedy? As the Left's real income and power seemed to grow, its psychic income can only have declined. We may have one-party control of our major media and of our cultural, intellectual, and academic life—but so did East Germany. And, on the one hand, while our one party—let us for convenience call it the Anti-America party (or AAP), because this has nothing to do with being a mere Republican or Democrat—seemed to be tightening its control intellectually, it could hardly be pleased by its problems politically. Was anybody listening?

The Anti-America party intervened visibly and vociferously in all three presidential campaigns in the 80's, and in all three it failed. The 1988 fiasco and its aftermath were especially galling. The AAP had done everything it could for Michael Dukakis; it had pulled out all the stops. Walter Mondale had had the good grace to disappear, but Dukakis had turned out to be not even an Adlai Stevenson who could be mythologically inflated in defeat. Instead, Dukakis shrank to the point where not even those who most ardently promoted him felt much other than embarrassment. Meanwhile, the Bush presidency itself supplies nonstop frustration for the AAP which worked so energetically, and nastily, to bring about his defeat. First, it turns out that eight years of anti-Reagan indoctrination did not prevent what was, in effect, a vote for a third term for the "ex-actor." As for Bush himself, he has become hugely popular, principally because times are good—better, in fact, than they have ever been, and everybody knows it—but also because Americans really do prefer old-fashioned Georges and Barbaras to new-fangled Mikes and Kittys. Again, it turns out that a decade's attack on the traditional family, and the traditional male role and all that, merely reminds people of how desperately they want traditional families and traditional men.

Still and all, this is only the minor part of the Left's discomfort. Our homegrown Anti-America party has been stripped of its global pretensions and connections. It has turned out to be the American Century after all. The present ascendancy of the United States—strategic, economic, and ideological—is really quite breathtaking. No single country—not even Britain at its height—has ever held an equivalent position. We who have been taught to be magnanimous and humble in times of triumph can therefore be grateful that the noisy petulance of the American Left has drowned out any unseemly gloating about America's successes.

WHAT can explain the dichotomy between the AAP's seeming successes and its real failures, between our familiarity with every detail of its

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thinking about every conceivable subject, and the triumph of things of which it has tried to keep us ignorant? The explanation might be as simple as the propensity of almost all people to sort through the junk and reject descriptions of reality which diverge radically from reality as they know it. In particular, the hateful anti-Americanism which suffuses public discourse is rejected by Americans to the degree that they know something about the subject under discussion. Besides, even citizens of a free society have learned the techniques of passive resistance to attempts at thought control. Consider, for example, what is permissible in public discourse about some of our domestic problems, what people really think about those same problems, and how they really discuss them among themselves. Do they flee Park Avenue apartments because they fear marauding bands of students from the Dalton School? In this respect, there is a certain harmonic resonance between the concepts of "workers' paradise" and "gorgeous mosaic," for they are joined by the propensity of sane people to flee from the true nature of both. People have learned from Lenin's famous question "who/whom?"—they are seldom if ever confused about who is doing what to them.

One likes to think that this is nature's way of mitigating the seeming cultural hegemony of the Left. And one also likes to think that those loci of the Left's power not normally answerable either electorally or economically—the university professoriate, the federal judiciary, the civil service—will also be impressed, even though, formally speaking, they are immune to the normal disciplines imposed by our society. Nor will the kind of anti-Americanism propounded by our intellectual classes persuade many people in a world which has experienced the political and philosophical revolutions of the 80's. Indeed, this mode of American academic and intellectual and journalistic discourse has entered the genre of self-parody, dotty and idiosyncratic when it is not just plain loony. More and more, people will react to it as they would react if North Korea's Kim Il Sung were to resume his old practice of buying full-page advertisements in the New York *Times*.

Then, too, there is the 80's transformation of the communications industry into a relative handful of enormous commercial organizations. True, the people who actually own or run these businesses dread denunciation for philistinism or illiberalism by their hired help, and do not much bother these employees when business is good. But this is still capitalism, and when television networks continue to lose viewers, when film investors start to lose money, and when the returns from publishing are not what they need to be, then all the old bets may be off. *Time*, for example, has lost hundreds of thousands of readers. So far, at least, the increasingly bizarre ideological bent of the magazine's editorial content has not been identified, in public anyway, as a possible culprit, but Time-Warner, Inc. may soon be driven to try *anything*, even normality.

YET one cannot be matter of fact, or overly analytical, or in any way cavalier about the enormous damage inflicted by the application of Left doctrines, or about the enormous effort required to repair the damage. It is easy enough to hope that the damage will be repaired sooner or later, but that phrase can encompass a long, painful, and frustrating period for those who have paid the real costs. "Sooner or later," for example, we will follow the lead of Leipzig and do away with the East German-like social and economic system which, in the name of progress and justice, the Left has managed to foist on our inner cities. This system, like socialism in general, contrives to make people poorer than they once were and then to keep them that way, all the while suppressing their capacities for normal civic, social, and cultural life.

The contribution of the 80's, then, is to make the repairs *seem* possible. For unlike many earlier decades which we remember as times of muddle, the 80's were the decade of clarity. As Kenneth Minogue of the London School of Economics has pointed out, there has never been a comparable test case in social, economic, and political life which was so plainly decided in favor of one side—the side of democracy and capitalism, our side. The decade, moreover, saw more freedom, more opportunity, more hope, and more prosperity for more people than any other ten-year period in the history of the world. That much of this was inspired and presided over by the United States validates our civic creed and vindicates the efforts of our citizens. It was a decade filled with accomplishments in this country and in the world on a scale so great that the mere memory of it will remind people of what can be achieved.

Meanwhile, the 90's have begun and the new decade already wants to know what the 80's have done for it lately. In praising the clarifying power of the 80's, however, one need not lose sight of other instructive eras. Winston Churchill, we remember, wrote a six-volume history of World War II. He inscribed a theme in each one; the last, *Triumph and Tragedy*, was written, he said, to recount how the great democracies triumphed and were thereby free to resume the follies which had nearly cost them their lives. It is always possible that the 90's will be a time for the resumption of such folly. But no one will be able to blame Ronald Reagan for that.

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Paul Starr: Have the ideas and policies prevailing in the United States in the 80's triumphed worldwide?

The coming of liberal democracy to Eastern Europe and the unraveling of Communism in the Soviet Union vindicate enduring principles of the West—those of open societies, competitive economies, and democratic political life with guarantees of individual liberty. It is wishful thinking, or at least premature, to talk of those ideas triumphing worldwide. Communism remains entrenched in East Asia; Islamic fundamentalism convulses nations from North Africa through South Asia; regimes in Africa and Latin America continue to be wracked by intractable social problems and political instability. The ultimate political destiny of the Soviet Union itself remains dark and uncertain.

But if it is an error to take the past year's progress for a consolidated victory and the Soviet bloc for the world, it is worse to confuse the common traditions of the West with particular policies of the Reagan administration. Liberals and conservatives alike have reason to celebrate the advance of principles that unite us. But the policies of the Reagan era that divide us have had no similar triumph, not among our allies and not at home.

I have no idea whether the Reagan administration's economic and social policies "stimulated greed on Wall Street" or "encouraged a general mood of selfishness." Greed and selfishness have never been in short supply on Wall Street or anywhere else. But the policies of the last decade have unquestionably left us with a colossal financial burden. The S & L fiasco is perhaps the most graphic illustration of the national costs of misconceived deregulation. The 1981 tax legislation helped to stimulate a wave of mergers and acquisitions that converted equity to debt on a massive scale and left many companies excessively leveraged and vulnerable to collapse, as the fall of the house of Drexel itself illustrated. Federal deficits at previously unimaginable levels added more to the national debt than in all of our previous history. Interest expenses now represent the third biggest item in the federal budget. As interest costs and the defense budget absorbed an increased share of federal spending, productive public investment—the share of government spending that goes to infrastructure and other productivity-improving purposes—declined to the lowest levels in four decades. Supply-side policies were supposed to increase the private savings rate; they failed to do so. America as a whole consumed 3 percent of GNP a year more than it produced; we made up the difference by borrowing from foreigners, and we shall be paying them back for years. All of this will be part of the long financial hangover from the 80's.

So, a costly decade, yes; a disastrous one, no. Relative to our Gross National Product, the federal debt is still smaller than it was after World War II. And while the proportion of that debt owed to foreigners is higher, the burden is manageable. So, too, are the staggering costs of the S & L bailout. But to say burdens are manageable is not to say we should celebrate or continue the policies that brought them upon us. It was not these policies that gave the United States, much less the West as a whole, a victory over Soviet Communism. Soviet power is collapsing because of the deep and endemic problems of Communism. The liberal democracies of the West are now gaining ground because they have discovered the means of reconciling initiative and innovation with political and economic stability. The deep strength of our system is forgiving: it permits us to make errors in policy, and to recover. But the errors made by the United States have a cost to our power and prosperity. Relative to Western Europe and Japan, the United States has slipped—because we have been unwise, and because they have graduated from the junior position in the alliance that they accepted for nearly a half century after World War II. Only in that restricted, relative sense is it possible to speak of American "decline."

In a larger sense, the United States faces extraordinary opportunities. Advances in science and technology are changing the basic relations of time and space in the economy and promoting a global expansion that should enable us to continue to grow and to cope with the problems of the environment, an aging society, and the persistence of hard-core poverty. The end of the cold war should enable us to shift resources, such as scientific talent, from the military to more economically productive uses. Nothing, of course, guarantees that we will succeed in capitalizing on those opportunities, but fate has not decreed that we go the way of the British empire.

INTERNALLY, the picture is highly uneven, socially and regionally. Whether you think the 80's were, from an economic standpoint, a good decade or a bad one depends exactly on that—your economic standpoint. For roughly the top third, the 80's were exceptionally good. The value of financial assets soared. Between 1980 and 1988 America's upper 20 percent of households increased their share of total income from 41.6 percent to 44.0 percent, while the share going to the bottom fifth fell from 5.1 percent to 4.6 percent. To take an even more stark contrast—this for the years 1977 to 1987—average incomes for the top 1 percent rose from $174,000 to $304,000 (up 74 percent), while average incomes for the bottom tenth dropped from $3,528 to $3,157 (down 10.5 percent). *Forbes*'s 1990 survey of 800 top chief executives found them making an average of $1.4 million, more than double the $620,000 they made in 1985, even though profits had increased only 40 percent over the same period. Average wages

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for production workers did not increase in real terms at all between 1980 and 1988. By the end of the decade, according to the economist Frank Levy, the median incomes (in 1989 dollars) of male high-school graduates, ages 25 to 34, had actually fallen from $23,000 to $20,000. One of four children under age six in America is growing up in a household with an income below the poverty line. Lower-income Americans have not just experienced a loss relative to the rich; their real level of living has declined. The homeless are but the most visible sign of that deterioration.

Increasing inequality has diverse sources. Since pre-tax incomes became more unequal during the 80's, tax policy cannot be the entire explanation. While the global economy offers new opportunities for those with skills and resources, it puts America's less skilled into direct competition with low-wage workers in poor countries. Economic changes unfriendly to less affluent Americans, however, did not appear for the first time in the 80's. In other periods, national policy sought successfully to reduce the gap between rich and poor. The difference in the last decade is that national policy has widened the gap.

Poverty is only one aspect of the continuing failures of social policy. The system of public schools that once gave us one of the highest educational levels in the world is now in deep trouble. Even apart from the poor, our children perform nowhere near the level of children in Japan and Western Europe. America's health-care system is by far the most expensive in the world, both absolutely and relative to our national income—yet some 37 million Americans, the majority of them members of families with a working adult, have no health insurance; and on every major indicator of health, we lag among the advanced societies. By the same comparison, we are beset by higher levels of drug use and violence and have the highest rate of imprisonment, with over a million Americans behind bars—the majority of them young men who ought to be contributing to rather than subtracting from America's wealth. The "prevailing ideas and policies" of the United States in the 80's show no sign of remedying these problems and are not models the rest of the world is driven to adopt.

IN THE great struggle between capitalism and socialism, socialism has lost. But among the capitalist countries, the variations in the design of institutions and policies are considerable, and the Reagan-era, laissez-faire model is by no means triumphing over the diverse alternatives. Highly interventionist governments in East Asia have had the highest rates of economic growth in recent years. The Western Europeans are committed to more comprehensive social policies and higher levels of public expenditure than is the United States; European unification is reinforcing that pattern. Throughout the world, environmental concerns are a reminder of the limits of the market.

In the United States, the two principal elements of the Reagan agenda of 1980—the drive to deregulate markets, privatize services, and cut back government, on the one hand, and to build up America's military posture on the other—are now played out. In some areas, such as telecommunications and trucking, deregulation reflected a political consensus, gotten under way before 1980, and is now well established. In others, such as the environment, the Reagan initiatives were divisive and quickly cut short. And in still others—finance, cable television, airlines—the results have been unimpressive, in some respects dismal. As a politically popular movement, deregulation is finished: the S & L scandal is the *coup de grâce*.

So, too, with cutbacks in government spending. In fact, overall government spending did not decline during the 80's because of higher defense budgets and interest costs. The cutbacks came entirely in discretionary social expenditures (that is, exclusive of Social Security), down from 9.7 to 7.3 percent of GNP (a cut of one-fourth). With the end of the cold war, that change may partially be reversed. California voters' recent approval of higher taxes for public infrastructure suggests that the acute taxophobia of the 80's is receding. President Bush's retreat on taxes may also be a signal.

DID the United States need to shift spending from domestic programs to defense as much as it did? Believers will insist higher defense budgets were essential to bringing about the breakdown of Soviet Communism. But it is a hard case to make, given the severity and systemic origins of the Soviets' problems. Some things are now clear. First, the CIA estimates of the Soviet economy that backed up our own high defense spending were grossly exaggerated; the Soviets were in much worse shape than conservatives, ironically, could admit. Second, the long-term contracts for weapons procurement made during the 80's hang over us like the S & L bailout. They are now costly to terminate even when the rationale behind some weapons systems is disappearing.

I do not believe, on the other hand, that there is any particular ill legacy to Reagan's foreign policy. The world has changed so radically in two years that the question of American intervention abroad takes on entirely different meaning today. The premises of 1980—that the United States needed to take a harder line against Soviet expansionism, deploying new weapons in Europe and opposing Soviet-supported regimes and movements elsewhere—lose their force in a world where the Europeans can take care of themselves, thank you, and many local and regional conflicts in the Third World are losing their former global significance. Confronted by an unfriendly dictator in some misbegotten Third World country, we ought to evaluate our interests in the cool recognition that

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it probably will not make much difference to us whether he is a white zebra with black stripes or a black zebra with white stripes. Indeed, the less the United States needs to vie with the Soviets for influence in the Third World, the less opportunity will such regimes have for playing one superpower against the other to extract arms and assistance. This is one of the less apparent "peace dividends" from the end of the cold war, and it will enable us to defend our real national interests in theaters of conflict where America's moral and political role is genuinely needed.

America's great opportunity now is to become the country we have held ourselves out to be. What people elsewhere in the world acclaim about the United States is not the policies that produce our budget deficits and trade deficits, our leveraged buyouts and financial bailouts, our failing public schools, costly and inequitable health-insurance system, welfare programs, housing policies, or drug-enforcement techniques. They admire our basic liberties, the openness of our society, the ingenuity of our technology, the freshness and energy of our culture. These deep springs of vitality continue to offer us our best hope for the future. The trick will be to apply that American energy to the common purposes and responsibilities to each other neglected during the last decade.

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Michael Novak: One of my favorite passages from presidential speeches runs as follows:

> Entertaining a due sense of our equal right to the use of our own faculties [and] to the acquisitions of our own industry . . . ; enlightened by a benign religion, professed . . . and practiced in various forms, yet all of them inculcating honesty, truth, temperance, gratitude, and the love of man; acknowledging and adoring an overruling Providence, which by all its dispensations proves that it delights in the happiness of man here and his greater happiness hereafter—with all these blessings, what more is necessary to make us a happy and a prosperous people? Still one more thing, fellow citizens—wise and frugal Government, which shall restrain men from injuring one another, shall leave them otherwise free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned. This is the sum of good government, and this is necessary to close the circle of our felicities.

This passage, of course, is not from Ronald Reagan in 1981 but from Thomas Jefferson in 1801; but the reader will perhaps agree that the spirit is Ronald Reagan's.

Indeed, Ronald Reagan spoke often of his presidency as "a new beginning," a fresh start on the original American experiment. In the classic sense, every successful revolution (*re-volvere*) is a turning back to first principles, and in the American case turning back to principles "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Reagan preached on democracy in London and Moscow, and made the principles of Jefferson and Lincoln echo far away: Jefferson's Declaration ("We hold these truths . . .") was used by Zdenek Janecek, a brewery worker in Prague in November 1989, to explain to his fellow workers the meaning of "the velvet revolution"; just as in Shanghai the preceding June, the students had carried aloft a white plaster replica of the Statue of Liberty. The Reagan revolution, like its predecessor, was a shot heard 'round the world.

Barely three weeks into office in 1981, President Reagan told guests at a White House dinner for Margaret Thatcher that Communism was being swept into the dustbin of history. His "simplistic" confidence made the sophisticated cringe, as did his later assertion that Communism was "the focus of evil" in the world. Described as Manichean and vociferously objected to by progressives in the West, this sentiment was solemnly assented to by those weighed down by that evil in the East and has become a commonplace in Eastern Europe today.

Indeed, the implication of the Reagan era for foreign policy is simple and inescapable. If he was right, the Left was wrong, wildly wrong, on just about every important issue of our time: on Communism, on human rights, on the arms buildup vs. the nuclear freeze, and even on the character of Mikhail Gorbachev.

I HAVE some particular claim to knowledge of Reagan's strategy on human rights since by his tenth day in office, the President had me flying to the Human Rights Commission (HRC) in Geneva, the first Reagan appointee to speak on any matter of foreign policy at all and "the first Reaganaut in European captivity," as my ambassadorial colleagues were amusingly to describe me. Before my arrival, these colleagues were said to be very curious, as if a Reaganaut might show up with holster and cowboy boots.

I remember answering one question after another at my first formal dinner, at the home of a Scandinavian ambassador, in terms supplied me by the Reagan administration: that America was founded in the name of human rights, so that on the central propositions our allies could expect unwavering consistency; that my instructions were to condone no violation of human rights anywhere in the world, but to criticize all abuses by a consistent standard; that on most practical ques-

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tions our voting instructions would most likely (97 times out of 100) be substantially like those of the Carter administration, since a great nation like an aircraft carrier changes course only slowly; but that our allies could expect our speeches and our actions to be more consistent with one another and more steady than the Carter administration's. In particular, Reagan would insist on holding the USSR, its satellites, Africa, and the Islamic countries to the same standard as Latin America was held: one single standard for all. Again, Reagan intended to be judged by results, not words: that is, by whether, after his term was through, the actual human-rights situation around the world had improved.

By this measure, the revolution in human rights and in the building of democracy around the world since 1981, not only in the Philippines and in Chile and in eleven other new democracies in Latin America but also in the heart of the "Evil Empire" itself, is in line with Reagan's policy. The world by 1990 is much closer to where Reagan wanted it to be—where Reagan pushed it to be—than anyone but he predicted. Let me dwell a little longer on the underlying strategy.

My colleague in Geneva, Richard Schifter (now Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights), argued openly that Western military power was the only reliable guarantor of human rights in the world, and that a serious and careful use of words was absolutely essential to the protection of human rights. He and I expressed our loathing for the Orwellian usages of the HRC (particularly its inversion of such words as "racist" and "terrorist" in its relentless annual assault upon Israel). We urged our allies to unite behind a strategy to advance Western concepts of human rights, rather than surrendering defensively one step after another in their erosion. We helped to form the first majority in the (then) thirty-seven-year history of the HRC to discover and to denounce in public even one human-rights abuse behind the Iron Curtain (Poland under martial law), and we began the process of including Cuba under human-rights scrutiny. Ronald Reagan wanted to signal to the world that human rights are not protected by slogans, promises, or words, but by institutions of democracy and civil society. This was a conscious long-term strategy.

THUS, when Mikhail Gorbachev came belatedly upon the scene as General Secretary in 1985, he faced a different ideological momentum in the world and a new correlation of forces. He was not at first any champion of *glasnost* or *perestroika*. People may forget how closed, stubborn, and testy Gorbachev was in the beginning about human rights, as evidenced by the glacial resistance of the Soviet delegation in Bern, Switzerland, at the Helsinki follow-up talks of May 1986, whose best offer Reagan turned down as totally inadequate. This was at the time when the disaster at Chernobyl was being hushed up, just before *glasnost* altered the climate.

To whom goes the credit for the great and sudden change of direction in the USSR, *Time* asked Agostino Cardinal Casaroli at the close of 1989? Earlier, the prudent and reserved Vatican Secretary of State had sought to moderate Reagan's military buildup, especially the Strategic Defense Initiative. Nonetheless, the experienced Vatican Cardinal carefully assigned credit as follows: "Ronald Reagan obligated the Soviet Union to increase its military spending to the limit of insupportability. He made everyone understand that rearmament was a dead-end street." This is a great tribute to Ronald Reagan.

Further, it is probable that Mikhail Gorbachev could not have agreed to the process leading to the liberation of Eastern Europe in 1989—and perhaps not even to *glasnost* and *perestroika* in 1986—in the face of any other American President except Ronald Reagan. First of all, only Reagan could have engineered both the decisive military buildup and the change in ideological warfare. Second, any liberal Democrat, even a liberal Republican, who would have "trusted" Gorbachev in those early days would have been sharply attacked by the very conservatives who were willing to be led by Reagan. For his part, Reagan laid the perfect foundation for Gorbachev's desperate attempt to save Communism and the USSR. Before he went to Geneva, President Reagan told a small group of friends that if he could have four or five hours alone with the new Soviet leader he was sure he could persuade him that he intended the Soviet Union no harm; and that a man of his age could be concerned only with the children of his children's generation. About Gorbachev, those present may have thought this hope terribly naive; but about Ronald Reagan it was thoroughly convincing. The record shows that Gorbachev also found it so.

In his earlier profession, Reagan had mastered both an instinctive grasp of the ideological drama within which persons speak their lines and a knack for reading quickly the essence of character, and so he quickly recognized Gorbachev as "a different kind of Communist . . . certainly no Lenin, . . . a new type of Russian," and played his own presidential lines accordingly. More than anyone else, Ronald Reagan made recent history happen as it did, and this marked his presidency with greatness. In Clare Booth Luce's game of epitaphs: "Ronald Reagan toppled Communism."

DOMESTICALLY, however, most of the New Class—leaders of culture, journalism, and social activism—have loathed what Ronald Reagan stands for since before he became President, while he was President, and still today. They were accustomed, in the age of television, to getting their way: they

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had driven out Johnson, destroyed Nixon, ridiculed Ford, humiliated Carter. They were astonished that Reagan could be elected, and it killed them that the public loved him more than them, which they blamed on the public's gullibility. And so the years 1981–88 were the darkest in their lives. They pretend now that it was a troubling illusion, an unhappy memory, a phase already ended. Having failed to vanquish Reagan in the hearts of the people while he was in office, they hope at least to blacken his memory.

To the decade that saw the greatest outpouring of private philanthropy in history ($115 billion in 1989, 88 percent of it given by individuals) and the largest outpouring of volunteer hours (more than 40 percent of American adults giving at least five hours per week) they have fraudulently tried to attach the name of "greed." Tens of millions of evangelicals, never politically active before, went from being "the silent majority" to taking an active part in politics. Millions rallied for "Back to Basics" programs in the schools. One of the greatest human-rights programs of all times, the pro-life movement, rose up from the grassroots with virtually no support whatever from the nation's cultural elites—indeed against the visible contempt of elites—to protest against the excesses of *Roe* v. *Wade* in 1973. (The same elites who protested loudly against "police brutality" toward civil-rights marchers in 1964, and against "the pigs" during 1968's youth rebellion, nodded with satisfaction as the police used unnecessary cruelty against the prayerful participants of Operation Rescue.)

Against much early scorn for Reaganomics, Ronald Reagan argued that cuts in income-tax rates were necessary for two reasons: both to hold level the percentage of national income going to government, and to generate economic growth. By arduous persuasion, brilliant tactics, and exceedingly close votes, Reagan got his tax cuts—and the country got the longest period of peacetime economic growth in American history, to the point that his critics stopped calling this success Reaganomics. When Reagan took office, the prime interest rate was 19 percent, inflation was 13.5 percent, and unemployment was over 7 (for a misery index of 40). When he left, the prime rate was 8, inflation less than 4, unemployment 5.2, and no one was talking about a misery index.

THESE successes both in foreign and in domestic affairs left the Left desperate. Thus, even as socialism was being discredited internationally (not only Communist socialism in Eastern Europe, but also Mitterrand's socialist turn of 1981), and even as Mitterrand, González, Soares, Kinnock, and other European social democrats turned speedily to market principles, free enterprise, and lower tax rates, the American Left reflexively turned to the old Marxist tactic of class warfare, envy, and resentment.

This line of attack has become the conventional wisdom of those American journalists who are easily intimidated by the Left. Reagan's tax cuts, they say, helped the rich and hurt the poor. Blacks especially, they say, suffered under Ronald Reagan. In America, inequality is growing, they say, and the U.S. leads all other major industrial countries in the gap dividing the upper fifth of the population from the lowest fifth.

All these assertions are false, as anyone who examines all the numbers sees; they are fashioned by selecting some numbers and neglecting others. Thus, Kevin Phillips in *The Politics of Rich and Poor* claims that "among major Western nations, the United States has displayed one of the sharpest cleavages between rich and poor." Phillips supports this with exceptionally rough World Bank data (about which the Bank itself signals caution) from the years 1978–80 (before the Reagan inauguration). He forgets that the U.S. is a continent-sized, multi-ethnic nation, not a small homogeneous nation like Denmark. Measures of inequality in our most Swedish state, Minnesota, come quite close to those of Sweden; those of the U.S. as a whole are better compared with those of Canada, Australia, or Europe as a whole. Besides, unlike social-democratic nations (Kevin Phillips, social democrat?), the U.S. is not and has never been committed to income equality. "The protection of different and unequal faculties of acquiring property," Madison wrote in *Federalist* #10, "is the first object of government." The people of the U.S. define fairness in terms of opportunity, not of outcomes, as the social-democratic writer Jennifer L. Hochschild plaintively reports in *What's Fair?* (1981).

Similar tricks are played with the lowest quintile in annual income. During the 80's, the total percentage of income going to the bottom quintile declined—but the total amount of income received by that quintile rose. This last point is encouraging, because since at least 1960 the characteristics of those in the bottom quintile have been steadily changing. By now, almost two-thirds of the householders in the bottom quintile are single women, and relatively few are married men. About half of these female householders are elderly widows. For this and other reasons most householders in the bottom quintile are nowadays not in the work force. Thus, even the unprecedented economic growth of the 80's could scarcely increase the cash income of those who are neither employed nor looking for work. And comparing the bottom quintile of 1988 with the bottom quintile of earlier decades is no longer comparing like with like.

The characteristics of householders in the top quintile have also changed. It is not so new that nearly all are married, have had at least four years of college, work full time, and are in their highest-earning years (45-64). What is new is that the highly-educated spouses of nearly all of them are

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also working full time for comparably high incomes—thus doubling the advantage of the top quintile over lower quintiles. As long as this phenomenon continues, so will "growing inequality." The Census Bureau figures on income, incidentally, are pre-tax and so entirely unaffected by cuts in tax rates.

MANY falsehoods have also been written about how the "Reagan tax cuts" have helped the rich at the expense of the poor. Yet Reagan's economic growth with low inflation was not nearly so damaging to the poor as was Carter's stagnation with high inflation. Carter's inflation raised the poverty level from $5,815 in 1976 to $8,414 in 1980, sweeping some 4.3 million persons below the poverty line simply by eroding the value of incomes. Nothing hurts the poor like inflation; Reagan stopped that.

More important, though, the Reagan tax cuts exempted most of the officially poor from paying any federal income taxes at all. (It was not Reagan, but the Congress, that raised Social Security taxes.) By 1987, those in the upper brackets paid both the highest amounts of federal income tax ever paid and the highest proportion of all income taxes ever paid. For example, those in the top 5 percent paid 37.6 percent of all income taxes in 1979, but 43 percent in 1987. The actual taxes they paid were also significantly higher, both as a gross amount and as an average effective tax rate (22.4 percent). The top 10 percent of returns in 1987 paid 55.4 percent of all federal income taxes. Indeed, the top half of taxpayers in 1987 paid 94.1 percent of all federal income taxes. The entire bottom half paid only the other 5.9 percent.

Moreover, in certain respects, the condition of blacks in the U.S. improved significantly. In 1980, only 9 million blacks were employed; by 1988 this number had jumped to 11.4 million. The total annual income earned by all U.S. blacks rose steeply (in constant 1988 dollars) from $191 billion in 1980 to $259 billion in 1988—a sum larger than the GDP of all but ten nations in the world. The number of black families earning more than $50,000 per year jumped from 392,000 in 1982 to 936,000 in 1988. The median income of black *married-couple* families in 1988 climbed to $30,424. Of course, the bleak side of this picture is that the number of *single-parent* black families rose by 15 percent between 1980 and 1988, from 1.9 million to 2.2 million. The vast majority of single female householders were not in the work force, and a majority of black children in 1988 were born out of wedlock. Here median income was far lower; and nearly all indices of suffering and disability were higher. No wonder the measure of inequality (gini coefficient) among blacks was far higher (.450) than among whites (.382).

Choices of family pattern are not entirely amenable to government intrusion, although some argue that federal welfare policies enable certain self-injuring behaviors. Reagan was able to set welfare thinking on a new course, but not to show a reversal in damaging trends.

MORE than these great foreign and domestic achievements, however, Reagan deserves credit for inspiring this large, diverse, and important country to keep faith with its own destiny. For him that destiny was manifest, and manifest he made it to the world—even to the Communist party of the USSR. Ronald Reagan may not have caused a revolution in America, but he did renew the original one and give it universal reach.

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William Phillips: The two questions posed by the editors of COMMENTARY actually come down to a single one: the relation of prevailing opinion among academics, intellectuals, and the media to political realities. The answer, unfortunately for the state of social thought, is that these opinions represent largely what people want to believe rather than sustained observation and analysis. Essentially, they reflect the disorder that has invaded much of our thinking about literature, philosophy, and politics. I suspect that this period may become known as the age of confusion.

In the political chaos that has surrounded the last decade—polemically known as the Reagan years or Reaganism—it is not easy to sort out the false from the true characterizations. On the whole, however, it is patently absurd to characterize the last decade as a plunge into darkness. Despite many of its failings, the country is scarcely in a catastrophic condition domestically. As for our foreign policies in the 80's, our standing in the world is higher than it ever has been since soon after World War II. And the movement toward democratization and the free market in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe certainly has vindicated our policies and done nothing to blacken the image of our own brand of democracy.

To be sure, not everything has been idyllic, even if it has not been disastrous. But to deny that it has been disastrous does not mean we should deny the failings. We cannot ignore the wild takeovers, the widespread corruption, and the frequent disregard of the national interest. Deregulation seems to have produced the S & L disaster. More might have been done to reduce the gap between the rich and the poor which appears to be widening; more

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could have been done to improve the environment; greater and more effective measures could have been taken to reduce crime and to do something about the abysmal state of education. But the confusion and the distortion arise when these failures are inflated so as to darken the entire picture and to dismiss the 80's as the black years of Reaganism. (Perhaps to make clear my own perspective, I should say I have never been a Reaganite.) But surely Reagan was not responsible for every failure; some were just as much the responsibility of Congress (controlled by the Democrats). And many of the vulgarities and the unlimited pursuit of self-interest that we abhor are rooted in the laissez-faire system—which, to be sure, Reagan did little to control—and in the emergence of the much-publicized "me" generation and the Yuppies with radical politics. This seems to be the price we pay for our liberties and our prosperity.

As for our foreign policies, they have been more successful than our domestic ones, though they have not been always intelligent or responsible. Nor are they sufficiently long-range. For example, the Iran-*contra* affair, however well-intentioned it might have been, was stupidly planned and executed. Also, relations with Israel were often strained because of some almost inexplicable blindness toward the machinations of the Arabs and an unwillingness to understand the demagogy and treachery of Arafat. The misleading slogan of evenhandedness masks the specific causes of the Israeli-Arab conflict. On the other hand, the arms buildup and the stiffening attitude toward the Soviet Union under Reagan, which came under so much liberal criticism, turned out to be not only correct but successful—as can be seen in the democratization of Eastern Europe and the easing of relations with Russia. (It must be said in this connection that Bush does not seem to be following Reagan's leads, particularly in his captious attitude to Israel and in his almost uncritical support of Gorbachev.)

PART of the negative characterization of the 80's is a cultural matter. For a good deal of the criticism of Reagan by academics and the media was a reaction to his style and his personality. The image of the actor who could read his own lines fluently but was not at ease with the language on his own did not command much respect from the educated classes. Indeed, Reagan did not have any of the aura of an intellectual leader, of a statesman. As a matter of fact, the gap between Reagan's reputed intellectual laziness and low-brow tastes on the one hand, and the fact that he was able to pull the country out of its post-Vietnam sloth on the other, remains something of a mystery. Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the political genius of the country, noted early by Tocqueville. Unlike the nations of Europe, which produce statesmen, we create political leaders who, like Reagan, Eisenhower, and Truman, represent the essence of the common man elevated to a leader.

But this is only half of the equation between the political realities and the popular perceptions of them. The other half, I think, lies in the area of ideology, the ideology of liberals and the Left, who have had much to do with our thinking about the events of the last decade. And here the question is not so much whether the ideas in this quarter have been right or wrong as that they have been the source of much muddled thinking. The point therefore is not whether Left-liberals have been wrong about Reagan and his years in office; in some respects they have been right. It is, rather, that the interminable Reagan-bashing with its automatic dismissal of everything connected with the Reagan years has made it difficult to arrive at a clear understanding of the ideas and events of the 80's. As I have suggested, in some matters, as in the new tax law, which is not what it was claimed to be, the Democrats have been as responsible as the Republicans. In other areas, such as crime, drugs, and economic inequities, the culpability that belongs to both parties and to the condition of our society as a whole has been attributed to the Reagan administration alone. On the other hand, the anti-anti-Communism of many liberals and much of the Left, which recent events have shown to be foolhardy, has generally escaped critical examination. The complete failure of socialism in the Soviet Union, for example, and the admission of terror and the slave-labor camps are themselves commentaries on those who regarded anti-Communist criticism as a species of conservatism.

The confusion scarcely lets up. We are now in the era of Bush-bashing, which is an automatic continuation of Reagan-bashing, even though on many key questions, with the notable exception of the issue of abortion and to some extent that of taxation, Bush is almost indistinguishable from liberal Democrats. On Lithuania and China, for example, there has been an ironic reversal, with the Democrats pressing for a tougher policy, and Bush leaning toward a softer one. On the other hand, extreme right-wingers, such as Patrick Buchanan, have made their own contributions to mindless policies by insisting that nothing basic has changed in the Soviet Union.

IN ESSENCE, the fact that Left-liberals have made it more difficult to think seriously about political and social questions is at least as important as their mistaken views. This is particularly unfortunate now when we are entering a new uncharted era, and when we are still fed the ideological platitudes that have served to conceal the real issues in the past. The two most important questions today are the unification of Germany and the extent of the changes in the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. And in both cases a certain

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amount of confusion comes from the persistence of old liberal views. In the matter of unification, fears of re-Nazification—which happen to coincide with Russian rather than American interests—are relics of liberal ideology (as well as the understandable feelings of many Jews). As for Gorbachev's Russia, we have difficulty in assessing its power and stability to some extent because of the lingering effects of the tendency to play down Russian economic backwardness, political controls, and military strength. No doubt, *glasnost* and *perestroika* represent significant liberating changes, but so far they have been limited in scope: the Communist regime is still intact, and genuine democracy and pluralism are not in sight.

Another example of the will to cling to outworn beliefs is the response of some socialists to the changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Many of them insist that socialism has not been repudiated and that there is no movement toward a free market. For example, Samuel Bowles, who describes himself as a leftist, says, in a recent comment in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, that the death of socialism in Eastern Europe will revitalize leftism in this country. There is also the continuing obfuscation in the use of the term "socialism." Usually it is not the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production advocated by Marx and Lenin that is meant by socialism. What is being referred to is some version of social democracy, generally a mild one, mainly little more than a welfare state.

THESE intellectual habits, it might be noted, are not limited to the area of practical politics. Much has been written criticizing the latest trends in deconstruction, feminist literary theory, black aesthetics—and the radical assault on the cultural tradition. (Helen Vendler's recent piece in the *New York Review of Books* is a devastating criticism of the feminist approach to literature.) But, to my knowledge, it has not been pointed out that aside from the question of their validity, these new cultural theories actually have produced an enormous amount of intellectual confusion. For to deny the primary meaning of texts and the authenticity of the Western tradition has created a state of intellectual anarchy, in which any theory seems to have as much credibility as any other. It is difficult to say which is cause and which is effect. But the confusion in political matters is of a piece with that in cultural ones. One is reminded of Dostoevsky's remark—through one of his characters—that if God doesn't exist, then anything is possible. Similarly, if there is no authority informed by tradition, then anything goes.

If, as I have suggested, we are intellectually handicapped by political confusion as well as by the profusion of trendy theories, it would seem to be less profitable to argue the validity of specific positions than to clear the air of ideological commitments—of those habits of mind that are bound to twist our thinking about many political and cultural questions.

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James Nuechterlein: The characterization of the 80's that introduces this symposium is taken seriously only by those who are not themselves serious. It is, not to put too fine a point on the matter, loser's history. This is history as seen by the adversary culture, dominant among "journalists, historians, and intellectuals," but quite unrecognizable to the unbeguiled majority. It is history as seen by those who don't much like America, and most Americans like America just fine, even if they are sometimes bemused by the inability of the country's cultural elites to appreciate the benefits of this almost chosen nation.

The antagonism of the adversary culture toward America's bourgeois democratic reality is of course nothing new. Earlier traces of it can be found among losing Federalist elites in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, in the moral fastidiousness of the New England Transcendentalists, in the goo-goo restorationism of the post-Civil War era (of which the supercilious Adams brothers were the perfect expression). It has come fully into its own in the 20th century, first in the 20's, again in the 50's, and now in overripe maturity in the 80's.

Two brief and partial points of concession. First, the current vogue of the adversary-culture perspective is part of the inevitable ebb and flow of political opinion. No political mood lasts forever, and it is in the nature of things that the conservatism of the 80's should produce something of a left-wing reaction. That reaction is exacerbated by the Bush succession: had Richard Nixon rather than John Kennedy succeeded Eisenhower in 1961, the relatively subdued reaction of the cultural elites of the time against the 50's would have been as exaggerated as is that of their counterparts against the 80's today. Second, there are elements of truth in the critical view of the 80's. There *were*, given the entrepreneurial enthusiasms of the time, excesses on Wall Street and elsewhere in the business community (though the idea that the Reagan administration somehow invented greed and selfishness is one of those stock moralisms that it takes an American liberal to believe), and there *was* a widening of the spread in income distribution during the period (though the vast majority of Americans improved their situation in the course of the decade and the

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desperate condition of the homeless and of the underclass of which they are a part owes far more to cultural and structural economic factors than to the policies of the Reagan administration).

THE great reality of the 80's, ignored almost as much on the Right as on the Left, is the ascendancy of conservatism. (The massive exception here—there are other partial ones—is the advance of feminism; its against-the-grain victories would require a separate essay properly to explore.) We have witnessed in the past decade a transformation of the vocabulary and agenda of the American political economy. Liberals (and Bourbon-restorationist conservatives) note that Americans have not fully repudiated the welfare state; they ignore the far more significant point that *no one* today calls for the return of the Great Society. Of course the Reagan administration did not restore laissez-faire; neither did the Harding, Coolidge, or Hoover administrations of the 20's. (For that matter, there was never in the American experience a condition of full laissez-faire to be restored.) What matters is that not only was the once seemingly inexorable march toward an ever-greater statism retarded, the idea behind it was brought fundamentally into question.

The temptations of hyperbole in political discourse duly noted, it is still fair to say that there occurred during the 80's a Reagan counterrevolution, and the further removed from it we become in time the more obvious in substance it will appear. I will leave to others in this symposium the making of the easy case in international affairs. Suffice it to say here that those who believe that the revolution of 1989 in Eastern Europe had little or nothing to do with the policies of the Reagan administration might as readily believe in the ministrations of the tooth fairy.

Reagan's achievements in the domestic sphere were, if less dramatic in effect than those in foreign affairs, no less significant in fact. Here a comparison with the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt suggests itself. Thirty years ago the noted American historian Carl Degler referred to FDR's New Deal as the Third American Revolution (after 1776 and 1861-65). By the term "revolution" he meant a number of things, but more than anything else he meant the idea that the federal government had taken ultimate responsibility for the functioning of the economy, that from that time forward it was to the public sector, not the private, that Americans would look as guarantor of economic health and security. Degler represented the conventional wisdom of the pre-Reagan postwar era, as was confirmed in President Richard Nixon's observation—then considered quite unexceptionable—that "we are all Keynesians now." (Today one wonders if there are any Keynesians left.)

The comparison of the Reagan 80's with the Roosevelt 30's can be pursued further. FDR's critics on the Left, much like those of Reagan on the Right, complained that he had not done enough, that he had squandered his chances truly to set things right, truly to seize the moment and rearrange America's political and economic landscape. It was only in hindsight that the significance of his changes became clear, only from Degler's perspective a quarter-century later that observers could perceive the outlines, within the context of an extraordinarily long-lived national consensus, of a peaceful American "revolution." It is in precisely such a context that one can speak soberly of a Reagan "counterrevolution," of a return, *mutatis mutandis*, to the classical Lockean ideals of bourgeois republicanism that the New Deal and the realities of economic modernity had presumably relegated to the dustbin of history. Not only did Reagan frustrate the Left's long-nurtured ambition to transform America's modest welfare state into a social-democratic redistributive state, he revitalized faith in the traditional (and presumably outmoded) American national virtues: individualism, private enterprise, the work ethic, voluntarism, personal freedom and responsibility.

THE magnitude of Reagan's accomplishment becomes fully apparent only in historical perspective. Anyone who has taught American history is acutely aware of the degree to which modern American political thought has been dominated by what might be called the progressive paradigm. The paradigm is disarmingly simple in outline. It suggests that the growth of big government is the inevitable result of the development of a complex national economy. In that view—prevalent since the emergence of Populism in the 1890's—modern industrial conditions required the development of a national governing authority equipped to manage the economy, regulate private corporations in the public interest, and provide a welfare system to meet the vagaries of modern life.

Originating in a form of economic determinism, the paradigm carried obvious implications for political ideology, not only in America but everywhere the modernization process operates. From its premises flowed implied justification for ever more fully developed manifestations of strong central government: the logic of historical development moved from laissez-faire to mild regulation to the welfare state to the planned economy to social democracy to one or another form of socialism. Within that perspective, liberal periods in the American past such as the Populist and Progressive eras and the New Deal represented necessary accommodations with the future, while conservative decades like the 20's, the 50's, and, by extension, the 80's represented anachronistic and futile protests against the imperatives of history. The progressive paradigm provided, in other words, the story line for modern American devel-

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opment, the framework within which one could place and make sense of particular events in the nation's history. And in that story line liberals were always right and conservatives always wrong.

The hegemony of the paradigm followed from its apparent unanswerability. The most dogmatic of libertarians, after all, would be hard-pressed to deny the paradigm altogether. It is the case that big government did, to some extent, flow inexorably from the processes of modern industrial development. Bigness begat bigness. The flaw in the paradigm issues from a subtle and insidious fallacy: the assumption that if, given modern conditions, some increase in government is good, even necessary, then more of that necessary good thing must be even better. But the conclusion does not follow—not in logic, and far less in history.

Americans learned that lesson in the episode of the Great Society. The Great Society represented a logical extension of the spirit of the Depression-era New Deal—the latter's innovations having been consolidated in modified terms during the Eisenhower 50's—into the prosperous 60's. But the Great Society was, by any standards, a great fiasco. It did not solve the social problems at which it threw such huge amounts of money (it made many of them worse); it was, in macroeconomic terms, fiscally debilitating; it created horrendous problems of social dependency; and it stimulated social divisions and social unrests from which the nation is still suffering. The lesson of the Great Society is inescapable: we would have been better off without it.

American liberalism has in fact never recovered from the Great Society. The Watergate debacle diverted America's attention for a considerable period, and the diversion continued during the odd and inept Carter interlude, but the larger pattern remained clear: the progressive paradigm had been broken and the "L-word" with which it was associated had become an ideological onus from which prudent politicians carefully distanced themselves. Activist government was no longer in the public mind an unambiguous good thing; it had become at best uncertain and problematic, at worst the unwitting source of our deepest problems.

It was Ronald Reagan's achievement to raise all this from the level of inchoate intuition to conscious perception. Perhaps, Americans came to understand, the 80's were not an aberration at all, any more than had been the 20's or 50's before them. Perhaps it was the decade of the 30's, with its unprecedented experience of economic catastrophe, that was the aberration. Perhaps a dominant free-enterprise economy, undergirded by a safety net for the small minority who could not make it on their own, made more sense of the American experience than did visions of collectivist social democracy. Perhaps—heretical thought—Reagan told the American story better than Roosevelt had. A counterrevolution, indeed—and one given ideological confirmation by the collapse of socialism and the socialist ideal everywhere except in circles of the willfully self-deceived.

Not that Reaganism has fully carried the day. It has had to deal with a problem of cultural lag. Even while the politics of the progressive paradigm came under radical reconsideration, its moral correlative remained more or less in force. Commonplace political rhetoric—rhetoric dominated, of course, by the "journalists, historians, and intellectuals" responsible for the tendentious characterization of the 80's that introduces this symposium—continued to equate social morality with government activism on behalf of those deemed to be the least-advantaged members of society. Concepts of "compassion" and "caring" translated inescapably in that view into new laws passed, new monies spent, new bureaucracies set in place. Despite the by-now innumerable cautionary experiences of the law of (doleful) unintended consequences of social policy, it remained the case into the Bush era that an administration skeptical of activist government placed itself by definition in the moral wrong. (There is also the troubled world of social issues—abortion, quotas, gay rights, feminism, crime and punishment, the family, moral and religious values—in which conservatives have made, at best, mixed advances and which will for the indefinite future remain an arena of *Kulturkampf*.)

But if conservativism is not unambiguously victorious, liberalism has, for the moment and into the foreseeable future, quite definitively lost. The liberals are writing coterie history to the contrary—history that tries to make its case by changing the subject—but there is no good reason why the rest of us should indulge their fantasies.

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Robert Coles: I do not think the 80's have by any means been a disastrous decade for America. At the beginning of that decade, the Soviet Union was a totalitarian state with a vast gulag of imprisoned souls, not to mention the oppressed people of Eastern Europe under its heel—all a far cry from what now obtains. To a significant extent the collapse of Communism had its own rhythms and causes—yet surely the military strength of the West and its relative unity under NATO account for some of that collapse. Who knows what Brezhnev and his heirs (not to mention the dreary and dreadful

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bureaucrats who ran the Eastern-bloc countries) might have done were the West a pushover for them politically and militarily! I think, all along, the implacable critique of Leninism and Stalinism has proven to be one of the glories of conservatism. Of course, not only naive, gullible, or wrong-headed leftists or liberals have made mistakes with respect to their judgment of Stalinist totalitarianism in its various forms. I would like to see some of our political scientists look carefully at what Jeane J. Kirkpatrick said about the possibilities for change in Communist dictatorships, and what Hannah Arendt handed down as virtually a doctrine in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*—the inviolability of such a political system. What would Arendt think and say were she alive about what has happened during the last few years of the 80's?

Moreover, who is checking up on the remarks and predictions made by many leaders of the so-called nuclear-freeze movement upon the election of Ronald Reagan? I listened to Dr. Helen Caldicott speak during that time, and I heard her warning us that a nuclear war was right around the corner (and I am here toning down severely her various statements).

A factory worker in the General Motors Chevrolet plant in Framingham, Massachusetts, told me he had heard Dr. Caldicott speak on his car radio, and thought this:

> She's half-crazy, and so are some who hold her up as the wisest one around. You can hear it in her voice, not just her words—all that scary talk, all that *screeching*, it is! And if you disagree with them, they point fingers and shout and try to tell you they're smart and you're dumb, and they're right and you're—well, you're not just wrong, you're *sick*!

A strange silence from such people now—and no eagerness to look critically at their own past judgments and, too, the accusations they leveled at others. For example, in the early 80's a few of us suggested to some leading nuclear-freeze activists that their rhetoric was terribly exaggerated—and that we really did not think it fair that they should go to schools, as they were doing, with a message that Reagan's election meant that a nuclear war was "inevitable" during his presidency. The response, I fear, showed that hysteria and meanness are by no means absent in people who regard themselves as sensitive and thoughtful and well educated. We were told we had this or that "problem," we were "denying reality," we were "rationalizing"—yet another reminder of a peculiar kind of cussing that is to be found among some of us in the psychoanalyzed segment of the liberal intelligentsia: if you don't agree with someone, quickly slap some psychological label on him or her, cast doubt about the person's motives, and in general use psychiatry as a discrediting device. In any event, all that seemed a strangely distant and irrelevant controversy by the end of the 80's.

As for our domestic scene, I applauded the emphasis in the 80's upon "family values"—a solid home life as the mainstay of society. I also was horrified and disgusted by an increasing indifference to the needs of millions of our most vulnerable citizens who were in jeopardy. I was, too, appalled by the various scandals of this past decade, the parade of crooks and phonies and liars who have walked before us on television and in our newspapers and magazines: the Boeskys and Milkens, the Swaggarts and Bakkers, and, of course, the high federal officials who have been shown to be part of all that—nothing new in our history, granted, but a reminder that those who denounce government excess and proclaim a new morality, all too readily, on the assumption of power, can exemplify in abundance what they have condemned.

Sometimes, as I look at this country's recent political life, I think we are shaping a system that casts doubt on any federal assistance to the ordinary working people of this country, while granting, in the form of tax advantages and credits and privileges, tariff laws, subsidies, all sorts of encouragement and support to the well-to-do and the wealthy—a sort of free enterprise for the working class and socialism for the rich. I grant that some of our welfare laws have not worked—as I well know from my work with teenage mothers, who so often need most the moral and spiritual life they badly lack. Without such a life they do, indeed, become the apathetic, depressed, "welfare-dependent" single parents their harshest critics accuse them of being. Still, we have not in the 80's reached out strenuously and adequately to such people—tried to figure out how we can engage with them so that they can, in turn, engage with our social and economic system. There is, too, plenty of old-fashioned, out-and-out racial suspicion and hate in this country—and, at times, I worry that such a side of our continuing history has been more than heeded (even catered to) by those who have succeeded politically in this past decade.

Personally, I have felt utterly out of keeping with much that has happened politically and culturally during the 80's. I have strongly endorsed Christopher Lasch's brilliant critique of the "culture of narcissim," including the role played in that "culture" by my ilk, the ubiquitous shrinks. (We've removed the Bible from our classrooms, and all too commonly downplayed the significance of the flag, but the school psychologists are a mainstay, it seems, and the ideology *they* propound—the moral and philosophical assumptions they often unwittingly affirm—seems in no danger from either our Supreme Court or our liberal critics.) I associate myself with Lasch and with Jean Bethke Elshtain, and with much that Daniel Bell has written—conservative on so-

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called social and cultural issues, and populist or egalitarian on economic issues: anxious to give working families and the poor the kind of economic boost our Congress gladly gives to already rich farmers and industrialists and bankers (the S & L scandal!) and defense contractors through various kinds of "special legislation"—again, tax breaks, credits, price supports, and on and on: a kind of "welfare dependency" we hear less discussed than is the case with that to be found in our urban ghettos. For some of us, then, the 80's may well have been a decade of political loneliness—unable to stomach the cultural side of American liberalism as well as the class bias of American conservatism, and tempted, as I surely was in 1990, not even to vote in a presidential election.

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Tom Bethell: The characterizations are wide of the mark. How, then, to explain why "so many people in America" accept the indictment? Well, let's see now . . . I think it goes something like this:

Throughout the 70's, the combination of inflation and an unindexed, "progressive" tax code moved all middle-income earners into tax brackets designed for the wealthy. This created great uneasiness across the land and led to the election of Ronald Reagan. Supply-side economics came in at about the same time. Stripped of all jargon, the new theory turned out to be timeless. Its central claim was that economic policy must be compatible with human nature. "Humans are rational," the supply-siders said, in effect, "and they will not work very hard if unjust and excessive taxation strips them of the fruits of their labor."

This insistence that human rationality must be acknowledged and deferred to by economic theorists may now seem unsurprising, but ten years ago the economics profession had strayed so far from all such "psychological" considerations that it seemed revolutionary. There ensued a tremendous outburst of indignation—echoes of which may still occasionally be heard on the editorial pages of the New York *Times*, the *Nation*, etc., and almost nightly on the CBS *Evening News*.

Economic journalists in particular led the charge against the restoration of human nature to economics. According to the cherished world view of the economics profession, there was something called "the economy" which worked hydraulically. There were income streams and savings sumps and liquidity traps—and worrisome imbalances if the levers of trade or fiscal or monetary policy weren't properly handled. (The pressure might drop alarmingly throughout the whole system and we'd all be in a pickle.) Tax cuts? They would be inflationary and the math was there to prove it. But as long as wisely trained, well-intentioned people were at the control panels in Washington, "the economy" would perform satisfactorily enough. Human nature had nothing to do with it. It was absurd and dangerous even to suggest such a thing. (Would you amateurs mind staying out of this serious business, best left to professionals?)

The insistence that people wouldn't be productive if deprived of the fruits of their labor was treated as though it were the kind of observation that a century earlier had been discarded as irrelevant by Alfred Marshall of Cambridge, the teacher of John Maynard Keynes. Marshall's *Principles of Economics*, published in 1890, had transformed "political economy" into "economics," and in the process philosophizing had been displaced by science, and much reactionary baggage discarded. In particular, the idea that the economic performance of a country depended on the self-interested behavior of its citizens was called into question.

Marshall believed, quaintly as it now seems, that human nature was changing rapidly, especially in the fifty years from 1840 to 1890 (corresponding to Charles Darwin's ascendancy), and this in turn, Marshall thought, had brought about a "change in the point of view of economics," which was beginning to pay "every year a greater attention to the pliability of human nature, and to the way in which the character of man affects and is affected by the prevalent methods of the production, distribution, and consumption of wealth." The need for private property, then, earlier regarded as axiomatic by economists, "doubtless reaches no deeper than the qualities of human nature," Marshall wrote. (Describing the intellectual climate of the late Victorian period, Bertrand Russell dryly noted that "everything was supposed to be evolving.")

But now, in 1980, there came this retrograde development. Supply-side amateurs were insisting that it was back to square one for human nature! The reintroduction of the idea of incentives into economics threatened to overturn whole libraries and faculties, institutions and schools of thought—a carefully nurtured way of looking at the economic universe which excluded the individual almost completely (except as a consumer of goods). So Arthur Laffer was laughed at and George Gilder ridiculed, but that damnable Ronald Reagan seemed to be putting their ideas into practice, more or less; and in England the pushy Margaret Thatcher, the greengrocer's daughter who became Prime Minister, was promoting the

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same silly ideas. How lacking in idealism they were, these parvenu advocates of the *nouveaux riches*! Was there to be no new society built? (No transformation of human nature after all?) No room for social justice? Were we to be thrown back on the tired old nostrums of private property, selfishness, and "greed"? Quite a setback for progress and civilization.

WE ALL know what happened next. The detested ideas were put into effect (in 1982) and the U.S. economy grew rapidly; it has not stopped growing since. There was likewise a great improvement of the British economy in the 80's. Furthermore, by the late 80's it no longer became plausible to pretend (as the CIA had been pretending) that the socialist economies of Eastern Europe were chugging along quite nicely in their own quirky way. (The 1989 edition of *The Statistical Abstract of the United States* claims that the GNP per capita of East Germany is higher than that of West Germany!) Then, in the fall of 1989, the Communist governments of these Eastern-bloc countries gave up without a struggle. Today the only question is: how do you build capitalism on socialist ruins?

My own belief is that the final failure of socialist economics has been quite distressing for many of the same people whose daily avocation has been accusing Americans of greed and selfishness. In 1982, the left-wing economist Robert Heilbroner was candid enough to admit that

> the collapse of the vision of socialism is one of the great intellectual traumas of the West. . . . As inefficiencies and indecencies have become evident in the Soviet Union, Cuba, China, East Germany, Poland, not to mention Yugoslavia itself, the once hallowed term "socialism" has become emptied of content. Moreover, as we look at the ideas of socialism apart from the forms it has taken in specific countries—ideas of central planning, nationalization, the "dictatorship of the proletariat"—we find the same sickening sense of vanishing ideals, empty slogans, terrible mistakes.

I'm sure that this "sickening sense" has been experienced by many intellectuals much more recently than 1982, but we hear few confessions from these people. (You only have to look at the worshipful reaction to Nelson Mandela to realize that the hunger for a socialist order is still very much alive.)

Don't forget, the Soviet Union was supposed to create "New Soviet Man." And that failure has been another big disappointment. The idea that human nature could be transformed came from Western Europe, and it is useful to think of the Soviet Union as having been for seventy years a passive laboratory for an evil experiment on man, suggested by Western intellectuals and carried out on unwilling subjects. As long as there was still some hope that this experiment might produce positive results, the Soviet Union remained effectively immune from Western criticism. And don't forget that these hopes were still alive as late as the 60's. But the experiment finally failed in the Gulag Archipelago, and today it has been effectively abandoned. The Soviet Union itself is unlikely to survive the experiment. It was a very costly and dangerous failure in applied sociology, and again, quietly traumatic for many in the West.

Only recently, it had seemed, we were well on the way to building new societies all over the world. They would be run by incorruptible, highly qualified leaders of men, beloved by their peoples, pragmatic in outlook, but driven by moral rather than merely material ambition. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania was the ideal. We would provide the cash and the condoms and the know-how where necessary (Robert McNamara and his World Bank would see to that); but when it came to soul and authenticity, by golly they would have something to teach *us* for a change.

Now it is becoming clear that if other countries are to attain our standard of living there is only one way they will be able to do so: they will have to forget about tribalism and adopt Western institutions. I am talking about the rule of law, secure private-property rights, the freedom of contract, government preferably limited constitutionally, and so on. (We are ourselves in danger of forgetting about, or even actively undermining, these institutions. Our leaders don't talk about them enough, or even really understand them. We talk too exclusively about democracy—an insufficient prescription.)

Those who take pleasure in condemning America find all this very galling. They may pay lip-service to the free market but in practice they despise it and will continue to do so. It creates wealth, yes, but it also denies power to intellectuals. It reduces lawyers to service-providers—working on wills and estates. I'll never forget Barry Bosworth, then as now with the Brookings Institution (he also worked for the Carter administration), telling me in 1976 that the trouble with free-market economists was that they were always talking themselves out of a job. True.

In the 1860's, an English legal historian named Sir Henry Maine noted that "the movement of progressive societies has hitherto been a movement from status to contract." Those who were formerly born to greatness were more and more being displaced by those who had succeeded through their own efforts. But even as Maine wrote, the socialist movement was gathering steam. There followed Sidney and Beatrice Webb, the Fabians (to whom Alfred Marshall was always deferential), the revolution of 1905, the Bolshevik Revolution, "New Soviet Man," Mao Zedong, Khrushchev, Sputnik, Fidel Castro, the 60's, "people's democracies," the Communist triumph in Vietnam . . . followed by Thatcher and Reagan and the 1980's.

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In retrospect, what we have been through is a century-long attempt to reverse Henry Maine's dictum: in other words, to replace contract with another kind of status—one deriving from credentials rather than birth. The 80's saw the end of this counterrevolution of expertise, much to the annoyance of the experts.

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Paul Kennedy: It is rarely wise, professional historians will warn you, to judge a decade—or a government—immediately upon its passing. Not only are we too close to the events and the personalities to be objective, we simply lack the longer-term perspective to provide us with the proper comparative measure of historical "success" or "failure." A monarch or a president regarded as mediocre by his contemporaries looks a lot better in posterity's eyes if it turns out that he is followed by several totally incompetent successors; a decade characterized by economic recovery and increased business confidence (the 20's, say) appears much more suspect retrospectively if it leads toward financial collapse and industrial decay (the 30's). If COMMENTARY is still flourishing in twenty-five years' time, it will be instructive to return to this issue, and check how valid our early rush to judgment upon the 80's appears by then.

Moreover, in this particular case the problems of premature historical assessment are compounded by the wildly conflicting images of—and opinions about—the Reagan presidency. While some adore Reagan, others denounce him vehemently. Already one has the sense that the more unbalanced critics have forgotten just how popular and appealing the previous President was in the eyes of many of his countrymen. His sense of humor, his gallantry, his natural charm, his preference for riding on the range rather than chairing committees, all in their way complemented his determination to "stand up" to Communism, to make the United States stronger militarily, to assert basic Western values. The Soviet Union had to be dealt with from a position of strength; international nuisances like Libya had to be taught a lesson; if military measures were called for, they would be carried out, be it in Grenada or the Persian Gulf. To an American public, angry and humiliated at various setbacks from Vietnam to Iran, this was a welcome relief. It was as if a frontier town, previously terrorized by outlaws, had at last received a new sheriff. The B-movie actor of the 40's cowboy films came into his own in the 80's White House. And the palpable weakening of resolve of the Soviet outlaw (or "Evil Empire") by the close of that decade, with Gorbachev virtually begging for a compromise, was ample vindication of this Reaganite policy of peace through strength. Clearly, in the view of many Americans, this had been a "good" presidency.

YET while the Reagan presidency was restoring the American position in world affairs in the short term, it was also weakening it over the longer term. This is not to blame the post-50's *relative* decline of the United States solely upon Republican mismanagement, as the Dukakis electoral campaign of 1988 tended to do. The shrinking American share of global GNP and world-manufacturing output, the erosion of its lead in high-tech industries, the failures in its public educational system, the dreadful poverty of its inner cities, the aging of its infrastructure, were long-term developments which neither Democratic nor Republican administrations had succeeded in reversing.

But Reagan's presidency was "bad," not simply because it tended to ignore such isues, but also—and more seriously—because it *exacerbated* them. Its reckless fiscal policies swiftly turned the United States from being the world's greatst creditor-nation to being its greatest debtor-nation. Its propensity to live beyond its means increased its deficits, and worsened its international indebtedness (and its overall current accounts); by 1988, it was no longer a truly independent nation financially. Its military buildup, based upon exaggerated estimates of Soviet "power," had siphoned off engineers, scientists, and skilled craftsmen from export-oriented industry, and given a further advantage to Japanese and European competitors. Its encouragement of a totally laissez-faire mentality had prevented any long-term industrial planning on the Japanese model. Its fondness for consumption had hurt savings rates and capital investment. Its concentration upon such symbolic issues as the pledge of allegiance in schools was accompanied by a neglect of any fundamental reforms of the educational system as a whole.

Above all, the sunny, upbeat tone of the Reagan presidency and the positive response of the American public to his "good" years in office—aspects of which were repeatedly emphasized in the Bush campaign of 1988—naturally left the country less ready and prepared to accept the "bad" years of confronting the harsher reality that lay ahead. Increasing taxes, reducing consumption, cutting entitlements, investing in science and infrastructure rather than automobiles and household goods, were going to be that much harder to achieve in future years because Reagan had succeeded in convincing a majority of the American people that all was well and that there was no need to change.

Ironically, one suspects that by early next cen-

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tury the greatest critics of American policies in the 80's are not going to be the liberals (although they no doubt will still have much to complain about), but the *true* conservatives: that is, those who prefer fiscal rectitude to profligacy, believe that the United States should possess and protect key strategic industries, distrust laissez-faire economics, and instinctively feel that the country's long-term prospects as a Great Power do rest upon a manufacturing and financial base that was badly eroded during the period of Reagan's carefree, good-humored, but essentially feckless presidency. It is from *that* quarter that there will be the greatest resentment of this 80's legacy of short-term charm and long-term harm.

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Richard John Neuhaus: Since I do not accept the characterization offered of the policies and ideas of the 80's, I have only to address the second question. To ask why "so many people" do accept the characterization offered is to ask why so many people identify with the general drift of the Left. Answering that would require an extended excursus on the intellectual history of the West. The more manageable question in this context is: if there has been something like a "worldwide triumph" of American ideas and policies in the 80's, why does the Left persist in denying the lessons to be drawn from that?

In trying to understand attitudes, whether on the Right or the Left, one should not underestimate the stupidity factor. Also, there is the fact that people value continuity. Their sense of self is at stake. They do not want to let down the side or to be accused of betraying the cause. Even the most putatively radical are traditionalists, as evident in the exhortation to "keep the faith." In addition, the revolution of 1989 took almost everyone by surprise. People were not prepared for the dramatic demise of Communism and the vindication of democracy and market economics. These events are still very new and have not been intellectually assimilated, never mind formulated into a usable partisan line. When in doubt, people who are paid to explain the world go on saying what they said before. Since recent turns of events falsify more propositions of the Left than of the Right, the Left is the more embarrassed and ends up offering more manifestly silly explanations.

We are currently in a period of post-cold-war Newspeak that, unfortunately, may not be short-lived. Thus people in comatose socialist regimes who still subscribe to the conventional doctrines of the Left are now called conservatives. Thus we are told that the Soviets' loss of the cold war proves that there never was a cold war, except in the fevered American imagination. Thus it is explained that the revolution of 1989 demonstrates the superiority of Communism, since they are having their revolution while there is no sign of revolution in our society. There is at present a deep, and frequently amusing, incoherence in the explanations being proffered by the Left.

That will not change any time soon. A turn toward coherence would require acknowledging that political arch-enemies (e.g., Reagan and his capitalist gang) were, at least in large part, right, and the Left was wrong. Self-examination, contrition, repentance, and amendment of life do not come easily. That is true on the Left and on the Right, but it is more true on the Left. It is more true on the Left because the secularized Left has made a deeper investment, even a religious investment, in political construals of reality.

The Right is more inclined to relativize the imperiousness of the political, and to take alarm at the slightest whiff of utopianism. The Left is more attractive to political heavy breathers who seek a perpetual high from visions of peace, justice, equality, and cosmic harmony. They seek, in sum, a world very much like that promised in the messianic age. Everyone, knowingly or not, shares that yearning, but the Left is different in that it thought it had the political and economic formulas for the realization of that hope in history. In the aftermath of 1989, a measure of sympathy is in order for people whose entire construction of reality has been rudely destroyed by the very history in which they had placed their faith. In the absence of an alternative belief system, they will, at least for a time, continue to sing the tunes they know, even if they are the tunes of the gods that failed.

Others on the Left are less ideologically driven but are extremely nervous about any talk of the "triumph" of American ideas and policies. They might, *sotto voce*, admit that America and the West come out of the 80's looking pretty good. They might even admit that their domestic political opponents turned out to be right on some important scores. But any talk of triumph, they fear, distracts attention from the many problems that need to be addressed in our society. So they tell us that, while it is clear that Communism and even socialism have failed, it is by no means evident that democracy and capitalism have triumphed. In this telling, the failure of the former seems almost causeless. Or, if there are causes, they are to be explained in terms of the internal contradictions, so to speak, of Communism.

UNDERLYING the strategic concern to keep attention focused on America's faults and failures, there is a moral anxiety about any talk of "triumph." Many in our elite cultures have learned well Reinhold Niebuhr's cautions against hubris,

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while ignoring what he had to say about historical responsibility. Patriotism, in their view, necessarily bespeaks arrogance. Patriotism and nationalism go together, and both offend against the vaulting universalism of the liberal vision. In the Niebuhrian view, patriotism may be grounded not in arrogance but in gratitude joined to a sense of responsibility. The "so many people" mentioned by the editors have great difficulties with that. The National Council of Churches, for example, this year issued a jeremiad declaring that 1992, the 500th anniversary of the landing by Columbus, should be marked not by celebration but by repentance for the exploitation, racism, colonialism, and genocide perpetrated by Europeans in the Americas.

The jeremiad is a venerable genre on both the Right and the Left. Jeremiads from the Right tend to deplore our decline from the high standards and achievements of the culture that defines who we are. Jeremiads from the Left tend to deplore the conceit that we are anything special to begin with. It is therefore much more embarrassing for the Left when Americans find themselves admired and emulated by almost the entire world. It was all right for Lincoln to talk about this experiment as the "last, best, hope of earth" in the context of our bleeding for our sin of slavery, but it is intolerable that we should derive any satisfaction from the world's agreeing with Lincoln in the present situation. In the view of the Left, invoking American ideals *against* America is acceptable. Thus, during the Vietnam war, we were incessantly reminded that the constitution promulgated by the gangsters in Hanoi was redolent with rhetoric lifted from Jefferson and friends. In short, in both its religious and more secularized forms, the Left typically confuses the Christian virtue of humility with self-hatred. More precisely, what is flaunted as humility is hatred of those who dissent from the Left's construal of America's crimes and failures.

The question of why "so many people in America itself" condemn the ideas and policies that seem now to be carrying the day has many parts. The aforementioned time factor accounts, partly, for the difficulty the Left is having in coming to terms with the fact that, in the last twenty years or so, the "stupid party" got smart. The Center and Right-of-Center is where the ideas are. That is hard to accept for a Left that has historically understood itself to be the party of innovation, imagination, and creativity.

Examples abound. Only this year did an institution of the moderate Left, Brookings, get around to recognizing the imperative of parental choice in educational reform. The explanation merchants of the Left are tying themselves in knots to make sense of "conservative bleeding hearts" such as Jack Kemp who advance new ideas about what might be good for the poor. Others find themselves having second thoughts about, *horribile dictu*, censorship as they simultaneously advocate government support for pornography and the prohibition of politically incorrect speech on university campuses. And yet others are, reluctantly, beginning to acknowledge that the interests of black America are not entirely congruent with continued support for a superannuated civil-rights leadership. A growing impatience is expressed not only with the Al Sharptons but with the upmarket Al Sharptons such as Jesse Jackson. And so it is that—on education, poverty, censorship, race, and much else—the moderate Left, slowly and painfully, makes "respectable" the ideas that have for years been current on the Right-of-Center. To be sure, even this sluggish process of change has not touched the "so many people" that the editors have in mind.

THE really big new thing in the aftermath of the revolution of 1989 is the now indisputable centrality of the cultural questions in public life. Public debate, in any society, is basically about three clusters of questions: the political, the economic, and the cultural. In the modern era, the great debates have concentrated on the political and economic. Indeed, for a very long time there has been a self-conscious effort to steer away from the cultural. The chief reason for this is that at the heart of the cultural are the most powerful beliefs and passions that, as in the wars of religion in the 16th and 17th centuries, can destroy civil discourse altogether. But now the arguments over the political and economic have come to an end, at least for a time. While there are marginal disagreements, it is now evident to all rational parties that representative democracy is the way to go politically, and the mainly free market is the way to go economically. For purposes of significant public debate, that leaves the cultural questions.

Both the Right and the Left will have a hard time getting accustomed to this new situation. But the Left will have the harder time, for the Right generally eschewed the notions of economic determinism and political utopianism. The Right, in most of its expressions, is more comfortable with the "social and moral questions," which is to say the cultural questions. The emergence of the cultural questions at front stage center returns us, interestingly enough, to what Aristotle understood as authentic politics. Ethics and politics, according to Aristotle, are the same inquiry, both asking, "How ought we to order our life together?" Public debate in our century was distracted from that question by the relatively brief political madness of Hitler, and by the prolonged political and economic madness of Marxism-Leninism. The energies of the best, brightest, and most sane of our thinkers were expended in combating those bloody absurdities.

Now, at long last, we are returned to the real business of politics. The new situation cannot but

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be deeply distressing to the "so many people." The Right has generally understood itself to be the guardian of culture, of the historically transmitted, of the "givens" of how we order our life together. In literature, the arts, and social arrangements so basic as the family, the Left understands itself to be countercultural. The self-understanding of the Left assumes that others will attend to preserving the culture that it is its business to change. Now, more than at any time since 1914, it becomes evident that the continuing argument is between Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill, between traditional responsibility and the unlimited play of critical consciousness.

If I am right about the recentering of the cultural, we should prepare ourselves for ever more concentrated debate on what are called the social and moral issues. On this view, for example, the abortion debate is not a distraction from politics but raises one of the most urgent political questions of our time: who belongs to the community for which we accept common responsibility? A reporter for the New York *Times* who covered both the big pro-choice march of 1989 and the pro-life march of earlier this year remarked on the phenomenon of "two Americas" and "two cultures," as indicated by the different vocabularies employed. The dominant language of the pro-choicers, she said, was about "rights and laws," while the dominant language of the pro-lifers was about "rights and wrongs."

IN THE era that we have now entered, those who can, with public persuasiveness, speak of rights and wrongs have the advantage. The "triumph" of American ideas and policies is the continuing triumph of the moral claims of the West after the two great barbarous aberrations of this century. This is not occasion for triumphalism, but for gratitude, true humility, and renewed seriousness about transmitting the civilizational story to the next generation. For many reasons, some of them mentioned above, this way of viewing the matter is abhorrent to the "so many people" who worry the editors, and who should worry all of us.

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Eugene D. Genovese: If the dreary remains of the left-wing press may be taken as a guide, the doughty survivors of the radical Left and of Left-liberalism—to the extent that the two can any longer be distinguished—are once again determined to make fools of themselves. Confronted by a victorious worldwide counterrevolution against everything they have stood for, they happily dwell on the evil legacy of Ronald Reagan. Ever ready to display a sense of humor, they claim credit for the wonderful doings in Europe, which, of course, reflect their own highest aspirations and the realization of what they themselves have wanted all along. Simultaneously, they condemn the ideology and policies of the American Right, which the leaders of those wonderful doings, not to mention the voters, take as their model.

The Left, viewing the disgraceful rout of its troops on all fronts, proudly claims victory abroad, while it undertakes the small task of convincing the American people that only the implementation of a thoroughly discredited agenda at home could save us from the horrors it claims as democratic triumphs everywhere else. Lacking the satirical genius of a Jonathan Swift, I respectfully ask to be allowed to pass over the spectacle in silence.

The pros and cons of Reaganism and the depth of the changes it has introduced will take a long time to sort out, and nothing is to be gained by continuing the present exchanges of encomiums and laments. But surely, the 80's will be remembered as the decade in which socialism met its Waterloo. No amount of blather about the collapse of Communism's having opened the way to "real" and "democratic" socialism will serve. The Communists, for better or worse, introduced the only socialism we have had, whereas the social democrats have everywhere settled for one or another form of state-regulated capitalism. Many things went into the making of the collapse of the Communist regimes, but, as every honest Communist from Gorbachev on admits, the immediate cause has been exposed as state ownership of the means of production—and for reasons that, alas, Ludwig von Mises, among other right-wingers, long ago identified.

THAT the collapse of socialism proves the virtue of a (nonexistent) free-market capitalism is another matter. The left-wing critics of Reaganism score heavily in their condemnation of the social and cultural barbarism that now reigns triumphant, even if they fail to notice that much of their critique was prefigured by traditionalist conservatives, who never have been enamored of the market and its businessman's culture. The crisis that has wracked the socialist world has obscured the crisis that is wracking the capitalist world in general and the United States in particular. And the many-sided crisis of both demonstrates the truth of the witticism, uttered more than a decade ago by John Lukacs, that the "isms" have become "wasms."

Socialism failed to do the one thing that might have saved it: generate the economic prosperity

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that could have provided the time for it to disassemble its Byzantine political systems and to establish the moral legitimacy without which no sense of political obligation is possible. In contrast, capitalism has once again proven superior to all alternatives in generating economic growth and technological development. It is easy to forget that the entire project of the socialist reconstruction of society proceeded on the bold Marxist assertion of the superiority of socialism as an economic system. Nothing could be more naive than the radical-Left daydream, which is today stronger than ever, that the economy would fare better in the wake of the destruction of all hierarchy and stratification and the transfer of economic power to the workplace. Everywhere and always, when such nostrums have been tried, the result has been a catastrophic erosion of the work ethic and a retreat into modern equivalents of peasant self-sufficiency and attendant economic devolution.

YET the beat goes on. Almost nowhere on the American Left do we find an inclination to subject its time-honored premises to the "radical critique" called for with respect to everything else. To begin with, the classic premise of the Left has been the inherent goodness or quasi-infinite malleability of human nature—a premise shared by much of the free-market Right, occasional pretenses and qualifications aside. This classic premise has especially triumphed in the mainline churches, which have traded the hard wisdom of Christian theology for a neo-transcendentalist reduction of sin to the passing embarrassment of a lapse from the good, and which have embraced a neo-universalist doctrine of the salvation of everyone. (Personally, I have always been thrilled by the prospect of meeting Adolf Hitler in heaven.) To this day it has not occurred to radical leftists and Left-liberals that the central contradiction in the socialist countries has been the vain attempt to combine an unrealizable goal of personal liberation with a form of social organization that, above all, requires maximum social discipline. Meanwhile, the Right, having sealed off its traditionalists, embraces the illusion of personal freedom and, with sound logic, hails the market as the one great social force for its realization.

Personal liberation we are getting with a vengeance. Unfortunately, the great theologians were right and the radical leftists and free-market right-wingers—for that is what these "conservatives" really are—are wrong. With high if unintended humor, the Left demands an "involved," "concerned," "compassionate," and "activist" central government to save the afflicted, and it does so, at least if we are to take seriously the rhetoric on abortion and gay liberation, by campaigning for the individual's absolute right to his—I trust not only her—own body. With even higher, if also unintended humor, the Right weeps and wails over the collapse of the family, of morality, of respect for religion, of education and higher learning, of our "social fabric," and it does so while campaigning for the extension of the very marketplace of consumer choice that has stamped capitalism as the greatest revolutionary solvent of traditional values in world history. Apparently, it never occurs to these defenders of God, family, and social order that "consumers," left to choose, should be expected, more often than not, to choose self-indulgence, corruption, and scintillating filth over more mundane commodities. What a pity we cannot heed William J. Bennett and Allan Bloom and restore a genuine core curriculum to all our schools. For then we might be able to require a four-semester sequence in Christian theology or at least in common decency and elementary good sense.

As is, the rot deepens: we are being overwhelmed by drugs; mass homelessness; the poisoning of our children with pornography, perversion, and impossible aspirations; the transformation of our cities into Third World metropolises for the ostentatiously rich and the miserably poor; and the steady decline of the national productivity, work ethic, and production of basic goods that undergird the whole. I very much doubt that sane, decent, and honorable right-wingers are sleeping any better than their left-wing counterparts.

The free market has always been a myth, never more so than in this age of international conglomerates and such evidence of massive corruption, greed, favoritism, and mismanagement as the S & L scandal. Irving Kristol may be right that much of the "peace dividend" will prove illusory, but, surely, the end of the cold war ought to offer fresh opportunities for some expansion and redirection of investment into socially more constructive efforts. The collapse of socialism should reinforce general acceptance of private property and a strong market sector, but it need not invite further irresponsibility by uncontrolled or inadequately controlled private interests.

WE ARE living through the early stage of a massive worldwide economic and social transformation, the outcome of which is neither fated nor readily predictable. Private property and markets are compatible with a wide variety of social, political, and economic systems. If socialism (state ownership of the means of production) has been economically and politically discredited, capitalism (private ownership of the means of production under minimal control) is daily being morally and socially discredited. Probably, if the best elements of the Left and Right were speaking to each other, they could agree on that much and on the need for a new departure. But no part of the political spectrum seems able to lay its own ghosts.

The Left has carried Marx's utopian view of human nature to its logical—and, ironically, ul-

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tra-individualist—conclusion and embraced every mutually exclusive call for personal as well as group liberation. The left wing of liberalism is following a similar trajectory, as the comical course of the national Democratic party attests. The right wing of liberalism stands for nothing discernible, at least at this moment. The Right, celebrating its electoral victories, finds itself in ideological disarray and on the verge of a political split. Morally responsible free-marketeers, including such libertarians as Murray Rothbard, stand aghast at the cultural unraveling that is accompanying the victories of their political and economic program. Unwilling to acknowledge the unraveling—the libertinism against which Rothbard admirably protests—to be the predictable outcome of a market mentality that reduces everything to the status of commodities, they content themselves with exhortations to consumers to make the right moral choices.

The free-marketeers, absurdly called "conservatives," either find our cultural situation perfectly acceptable or at least bearable, or blame the atrocities on continued statism, bureaucracy, and welfare paternalism. They may have a point about those diseases, but their projected cure of heavier doses of individualism promises nothing except exacerbation. The sickening racial crisis alone should be enough to make clear that no solution short of the ghastly would be possible without measures that bring communities and groups to center stage and reaffirm the traditionalist and once-Marxist principle that individual freedom must be understood as a product of social organization. The free society most of us want can be free only to the extent that social safety and the requisites of social discipline permit. A society deserves to be called free to the extent that it places the burden of proof on the state when limitations on individual freedom are called for. No one has an absolute right to his own body, but no state should be tolerated if, without compelling reason, it restricts the individual's claims to privacy and to rights in his body.

NONE of us has an immediate solution to the drug problem, which has become a life-threatening cancer on our body politic. But who could believe that a country with our level of political culture and material resources could be overawed by a gangster empire, if it had the will to prevail? Undoubtedly, action would require curtailment or redefinition of civil liberties, not to mention the high cost of incarceration and some judiciously selected executions. The requisite action carries with it potential evils that ought not to be taken lightly. But if the drug problem is indeed a cancer, if we are indeed in a "war," if we mean what we say, then the only matter left to discuss ought to be how to provide maximum guarantees against excesses of a police-state nature.

And the same principle holds for racism, for poverty, for crime, for homelessness, for pornography, for all other conditions and practices incompatible with civilized life. I do not believe that the necessary measures could be carried out without the restoration of a productive national economy. And even then, I do not believe that such measures could be carried out safely—with respect for the genuine claims of freedom—without the restructuring of our socioeconomic relations in the context of a corporatism that respects private property but makes it subject to social control and the guidelines of a national moral consensus. Traditionalists, especially the Southern traditionalists to whom the Reagan and Bush administrations have given short shrift, have been saying much of this for a long time. Those on the Left who did not get drunk on the anarchism of the 60's have too. And unless I badly misread the signs of the times, large numbers of people across the political spectrum are ready to say Amen! Whether we remain able to hammer out the specifics of an appropriate vision and find leaders worthy of the challenge remains to be seen.

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Hilton Kramer: Of the very few things that we can believe with absolute certainty about the 80's—a decade more difficult to assess than any I have lived through—one is that the cold-war anti-Communists were proved right not only in their moral condemnation of Communism but in the policies they devised for its destruction. Another is that these same cold-war anti-Communists are never going to be forgiven by the Left—which nowadays includes almost (if not quite) everybody in the media, the academy, the arts, the literary and publishing worlds, the entertainment industry, and the Democratic party—for being right about the most important political question of this century. The Left will fight to the last ditch—or the last oped article, anyway—to uphold the notion, which no sane person east of the now-dismantled Berlin Wall believes for one moment, that the steadfast cold-war policies of the West had nothing whatever to do with the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe and its accelerating disintegration in the Soviet Union.

Indeed, the claim is now made—not only in places like the *Nation* but even in *Time* and other mainstream publications—that the United States actually impeded the collapse of Communism by resisting its triumph. (I know this sounds crazy,

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but that is the kind of craziness with which we are now obliged to contend.) It was left to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., always ready to bend history to the purposes of liberal mythology, to cap such claims by arguing that the events of 1989 represent a vindication of FDR's concessions to Stalin at Yalta! "In the short run," Schlesinger wrote recently in the *Wall Street Journal*, "Stalin gained. But statesmanship is tested by the long run. Now, forty-five years later, the Soviet Union is at last honoring the Yalta agreements." In other words, it was Franklin Roosevelt, not Ronald Reagan, who won the cold war. Or are we being asked to believe that there wasn't any cold war to win? In this kind of Alice-in-Wonderland historiography, reality—even if it has cost millions of lives and caused suffering and loss beyond measure—is easily dispensed with.

It would be nice to be able to attribute such absurdities to sheer cynicism or fatuousness—factors that are never to be discounted in the thinking of the liberal old guard. But in fact something far more significant and sinister is involved, and in this development old-guard liberals like Professor Schlesinger, still harboring their daydream of an eternal return to the New Deal or the New Frontier, are mere supernumeraries. They can still be wheeled in on ceremonial occasions to lend intellectual respectability to certain ideas—the idea, for example, that the policies of the Reagan administration had nothing whatever to do with the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe—but they no longer play much of a role in setting the Left's agenda, which in fact is a good deal more radical than anything dreamt of in Professor Schlesinger's philosophy.

THAT agenda, it is worth recalling, had its origin in the radical protest movements and counterculture of the 60's—above all, in the idea that America, or rather "Amerika," was at once an intolerably repressive society at home and the principal source of political evil abroad. The rapidity with which this bizarre and fundamentally mendacious political fantasy became so deeply rooted in our cultural life and the power it has continued to exert over the course of the last two decades—power that has now come to dominate larger and larger areas of American life—have never, to my satisfaction, been adequately explained. Perhaps there *is* such a thing as a collective death-wish that comes to afflict certain societies when so many of their material needs are met and so many of their spiritual hungers are left unmet, thus opening them to the appeal of strange gods. I would like to think otherwise, but the evidence of our own society just now makes one cautious about rejecting such distasteful theories. Whatever our explanation for the state of affairs in which we find ourselves, however, the fact remains that this thoroughly bogus and pernicious idea of American civilization is the one that currently prevails at almost every level of cultural life. It is as much in evidence in our law schools as it is in our wretched pop music. It governs the ideological outlook of the commercial television networks quite as much, though not quite as vehemently or systematically, as it dominates PBS programming and National Public Radio. And it is now a permanent part of the academic curriculum—the only part that meets with no protests about "canonization"—in our elite schools and universities. It is the reason why there is no longer anything in American life that can reasonably be described as a political center. The polarization that the radical movement of the 60's set out to achieve—the division of American society into "them" and "us"—is now a fact of cultural life, and looks to be an enduring one. We have become, in effect, two nations—or at least two societies—that are so deeply divided about the fundamental issues of American life that public questions as diverse as Supreme Court appointments, the grant-making procedures of the National Endowment for the Arts, and the problems entailed in dealing with the AIDS crisis are inevitably escalated into battles resembling a form of cultural civil war.

Given these divisions, there was never any chance that the real achievements of America in the 80's—a prosperous economy at home and a triumphant victory in the cold war abroad—would be treated by the culture as anything but a further index of American failure. Toward the Reagan administration in particular and American society in general our cultural establishment has long operated on the model of the Soviet justice system: the first thing to be determined is a verdict—which is always the same verdict: guilty!—and only then is it necessary to cite an appropriate crime. Is it any wonder that the media are so universally despised or that so many newspapers and magazines are suffering a historic loss of readership? The other America—the America that is so benighted that it cannot understand why its grade-school kids, while barely able to read, must be instructed in the use of condoms, not to mention the niceties of anal intercourse, or why its tax money should be devoted to exhibiting pictures of young men inflicting sexual torture upon each other—this America knows when it is being lied to about issues of great moral import. This other America—which, I daresay, encompasses a larger portion of the "enlightened" middle class than can nowadays ever admit to doubts on these matters, lest it be branded yahoos, reactionaries, or (worst of all) Reaganites—feels itself morally disenfranchised and more than a little terrified. Wherever it turns for moral support—the classroom, the pulpit, the legal system, or even its representatives in government—it meets with the same response: elaborate, "caring," sophistical explanations as to why yesterday's road to perdi-

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tion must now be regarded as tomorrow's path to salvation. No wonder there is such a widespread feeling of moral panic in this country.

As FOR all those pronouncements about greed and selfishness and the disorderly life of our cities and schools, I am not myself inclined to look for lessons in ethics and morals—not to mention social policy—from the folks whose lethal programs and ideas set us on the course that has led to our present horrors. We know from what quarter the concentrated assault on the family as an institution was initiated, and with what results. We know what elements in our political life organized the destruction of the New York City school system—until then, one of the best in the world—back in the 60's. We know in what part of our culture the legitimation—nay, the celebration—of drugs as a way of life originated. (Allen Ginsberg, please take a bow here.) We know who launched the "black-power" movement, thereby destroying the civil-rights movement of the early 60's, that has cost blacks even more than it has cost the rest of us in this society. In the politics of the social disintegration that now besets us, as in the decadent culture that is now swamping us, we are witnessing the denouement of every rotten idea the 60's bequeathed us a generation or more ago. If ours was a society with a highly developed sense of shame, the folks who championed these ideas would be reduced to a repentant silence. Instead they are more loudly than ever urging more of the same for the future.

It was the *New Republic*—not exactly a Reaganite journal—that spoke in its 70th-anniversary editorial, in 1984, of "the terrible social pathologies emerging from the welfare state," and went on to point out that "liberals are in crisis because they have hardly begun to figure out a coherent response, first, to the unhappy social facts; and second, to the vast defection of voters from the liberal dispensation in public policy." The only thing that has changed since those words were written is that six years later the same "terrible social pathologies" are even more advanced than hitherto and are now invoked on the Left as if they were simply a product of the Reagan administration. Whether this is a case of historical amnesia or political cyncism—or both—I shall leave for others to determine.

SOMETHING like this same combination of historical amnesia and political cynicism, together with a large element of moral insensibility, now beclouds the discussion of the momentous events taking place abroad. The ease with which the media and the academy in this country have been allowed to claim the collapse of Communism as, of all things, a vindication of the idea of revolution is yet another sign of the bad faith that permeates virtually all public discourse about politics on the Left today. What has been happening in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is, in actual fact, the most sweeping example of a counterrevolution known to modern history. Yet our press, our pundits, and—most unforgivable of all—our Republican President prattle on, without challenge, about the "revolutionary" developments that are attempting, not always very successfully, to bring democracy and capitalism to societies devastated by the destructive consequences of revolution. This is something more than a quarrel about words. It is a battle of ideas—ideas about how to live our lives—and in that battle we seem unable to articulate the moral imperatives of the counterrevolutionary movement we have done so much to set in motion. This, too, is a legacy of the 60's.

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Cap's Knife

FIGHTING FOR PEACE: SEVEN CRITICAL YEARS IN THE PENTAGON. By CASPAR WEINBERGER. *Warner Books. 464 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by ANGELO M. CODEVILLA

THE New York *Times*'s reviewer called this book a work of fantasy. The *New Republic*'s criticized it for neglecting its proper subject, namely, defense policy. *National Review* published an exchange (based on an excerpt from the book) between the author and former National Security Adviser Robert C. MacFarlane, both parts consisting largely of personal nastiness. Why, then, should anyone bother with *Fighting for Peace*? The answer is that to read this intensely personal book is to learn to what sort of human being Ronald Reagan entrusted the defense of the United States, and, at least indirectly, what happened to that trust in the years (1981-87) of his tenure.

As others have pointed out, in this book Caspar Weinberger shows himself to be a man who to his superiors gives empty praise, of his subordinates demands it. Thus, Weinberger speaks of Ronald Reagan the way underlings used to speak of Stalin or Kim Il Sung: all-wise, all-caring, never wrong. As for subordinates, Weinberger depicts everyone who tried to argue with him as a bad guy, someone with "an agenda." The good guys? The "permanent professionals," who never showed him an "agenda," and went out of their way to be helpful. How those professionals dealt with Weinberger may be seen in one particularly outrageous scheme the Air Force favored for basing the MX missile: it was labeled with an acronym corresponding to Weinberger's nickname: CAP.

Weinberger in office picked people to be around him who would bow deeply, but had few if any other qualifications. Paul Thayer, his deputy, left office pursued by charges of conflict of interest; Richard de Lauer, chief of research and engineering, was widely regarded as an embarrassment; Verne Orr, a California car dealer who knew nothing of things military, was Weinberger's replacement for the brilliant Hans Mark as Secretary of the Air Force; Robert Cooper, a member of the New Age cult, Life Springs, as director of advanced research projects fought the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) program at every turn. The only strong-minded people at high levels in Weinberger's Pentagon—Fred Iklé, John Lehman, and Richard Perle—were forced on him, and he resented them mightily.

Weinberger's relation to bureaucratic responsibility gives a strong flavor of the man. Who was responsible for the death of 241 Marines in Beirut in 1983? The commission Weinberger appointed at the time, acting in accordance with military tradition, laid the blame on the commanders on the scene and to a lesser extent on the chain of command which constrained them, stretching up to the Secretary of Defense. President Reagan also took personal responsibility, because the Marines were in Lebanon on his orders. But Weinberger writes now that the Great Leader could not possibly have been responsible, even though the President's orders in effect made the Marines sitting ducks. And of course Weinberger himself was not responsible, even though he could have made those ducks impregnable but did not. As for the commanders on the scene, who could also have taken such precautions, or asked for them from Washington, or resigned in protest at the lack of them, they, too, are absolved, having "suffered enough." So it emerges that nobody was responsible—except MacFarlane, who somehow worked a spell on the Great Man to send the Marines in the first place; and except Israel (more on this below).

Similarly, with Iran-*contra*. Here, too, the Great Helmsman was blameless: he issued no arms-for-hostages orders. Nor can the Secretary of Defense be held responsible, though it was his department that shipped the arms to Iran without explicit orders from the Infallible One. Nor can the Secretary of State who, also without orders, cut out of the operation his own Under Secretary for Security Assistance and let the National Security Council contact foreign governments as if it and not he represented the President. Who, then, was responsible? MacFarlane, again (and again, Israel). In Weinberger's world, credit accrues directly according to rank, and blame accrues inversely. Evil initiative always comes from below.

During Weinberger's term of office he was often accused of having no defense policy *per se* beyond the raising of money and more money for military-service bureaucrats. And indeed in this book Weinberger talks with pride of how much extra money he got for the overall budget. His refutation of the charge that he was a mere fundraiser reduces to a single sentence: "The service secretaries and the service chiefs will be the best witnesses that they did not get all they wanted, either in budget totals or in the make-up of each budget." But he also admits to having asked the individual services for their wish lists. Most important, he never gives a hint of any priority that he or anyone in his office imposed on them.

Weinberger today bristles at the suggestion that by his spendthrift habits he effectively killed the national consensus for bigger defense budgets. But the figures are hard to argue with. The upsurge had started during the Carter years, as advocates of defense made the case that a threat existed and that it could be met. In the aftermath of the 1980 election, when Weinberger submitted his first budget, Congress was ready to vote for anything

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labeled "defense."But the enthusiasm, and the increases, faded fast. By fiscal-year 1986 the budget was down 4.4 percent in real terms. Weinberger now blames Congress, the American people, and democracy itself. He ought to blame himself for failing to put to better use the funds he secured.

On June 15, 1981, soon after Weinberger had announced his $1.5 trillion, five-year defense plan, the New York *Times* editorialized that spending all that money would not make the American people safer; therefore, the amount should be reduced and more emphasis should be placed on arms control. Many involved in defense policy-making at the time urged Weinberger to rise to the *Times*'s challenge by articulating military plans that would demonstrably make the country safer. Weinberger refused: the military professionals would make the plans, Congress would approve them because the President would ask it to, and the *Times* editorialists were a bunch of liberals who had lost the election. But the *Times*, liberal or not, had raised a reasonable point which, if not answered substantively, would win by default. Weinberger did not, and it did.

THE intellectual respectability of defense policy, especially in the area of strategic weapons, took a nosedive under Weinberger. Whether or not one agrees with the strategic policies of former Secretaries of Defense Robert McNamara and Harold Brown, those policies were tied to weapons that the U.S. actually possessed or had ordered, and took into consideration targets that the weapons could actually destroy. Under Weinberger, by contrast, the services were encouraged to "write up" plans for "holding at risk" a Soviet leadership and Soviet strategic forces that had long since put themselves outside the reach of our retaliation. The classified documents now read like pyramids of favorable assumptions, and the public annual reports read like fairy tales.

One of the major figures in these fairy tales was SDI. Now, it is all too easy to show that the U.S. needed, and still needs, an anti-missile defense. But as his book makes clear, Weinberger, for all that he carries on about SDI as a brilliant Reaganite insight that would make up for all our military insufficiencies, does not understand the need for such a missile defense, does not begin to understand the SDI program, and seems quite content to leave the U.S. undefended.

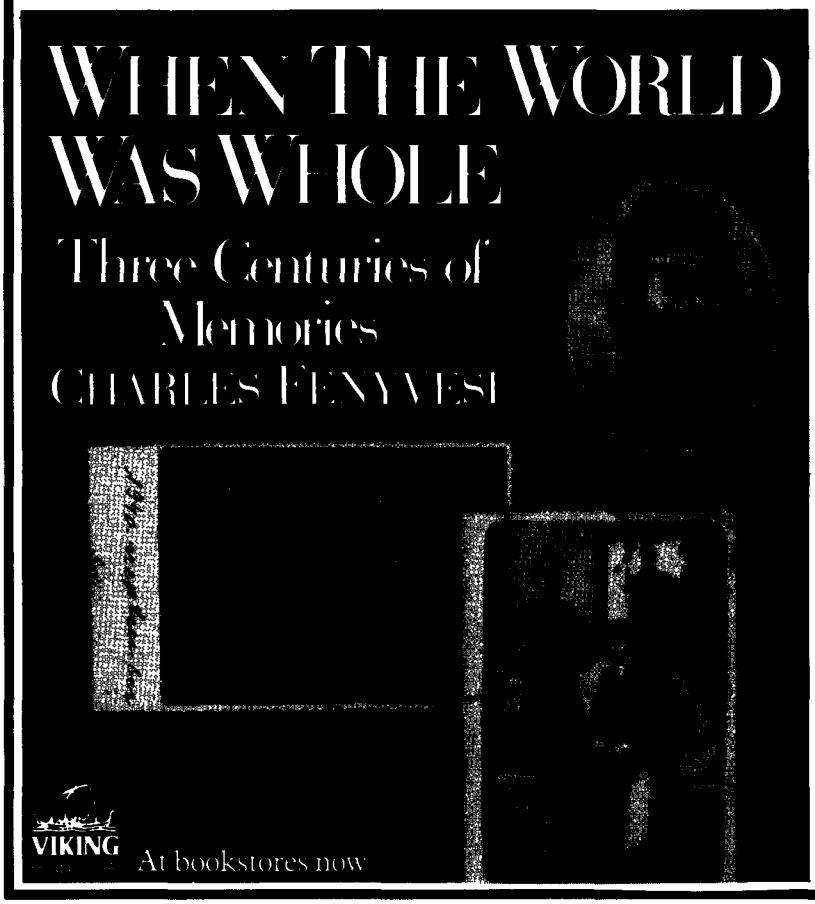
For Weinberger, what was wrong with the SALT treaties of the 1970's was that they were followed by increases in Soviet strategic weapons—there is nothing here about the fact that the weapons in question were peculiarly suited to a disarming strike. Similarly, what was wrong with the ABM treaty in his eyes was that the Soviets violated it by building a radar installation at Krasnoyarsk—there is nothing here about the whole complex of defensive devices coming off Soviet production lines. In short, Weinberger does not appear to have grasped the precise nature of the military predicament that the U.S. was in, and that SDI was designed to address.

Weinberger says that "before

Remembrances of a vanished world.

For generations, they were custodians of the land and of the traditions that had long sustained the Jewish people. In time, they became landowners and leading figures in their village—until global cataclysms shattered their way of life forever.

In this richly textured narrative, Charles Fenyvesi evokes not only the personal history of his own family but also the spirit, the dreams, and the tragedies of the Jews of Central Europe, the men and women who thrived when the world was whole.



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1983" there was practically no anti-missile work in the United States other than marginal improvements on old-style ABMs, and that before fiscal-year 1985, when $1.4 billion was appropriated for SDI, no money was spent on advanced, space-based anti-missile defense. This is ignorance. In 1983 (fiscal 1984) the SDI label was stuck on a bunch of longstanding Pentagon programs that *already* added up to $1.4 billion, and that had long been scheduled to grow at least as rapidly as the SDI budget later grew. Moreover, these programs were designed to produce actual anti-missile devices, some space-based. Weinberger proudly writes that he opposed those who wanted to build these devices because they would have been "a familiar mode of solely ground-based largely ineffective systems." This misstates the substance of amendments by Senators Malcolm Wallop, Pete Wilson, and Dan Quayle to build a *variety* of ground- and space-based systems. Weinberger's pride in his opposition to these proposals is again based on ignorance. So is his confidence in the SDI program as constituted, which to date has spent some $20 billion, has transformed those programs into long-term research efforts, and has produced nothing.

As Secretary of Defense, then, Weinberger was incompetent. It has been suggested that he would have done better as Secretary of State, the job he really wanted. This book is evidence for the proposition that he would have been worse. At least, as Secretary of Defense he had the instinct to prefer larger budgets to smaller ones. But the management of foreign policy requires above all the instinct to prefer friends to enemies. From *Fighting for Peace* one learns that Weinberger lacked such an instinct.

Consider U.S. policy in the Middle East. About all the countries in the area but one, Weinberger's feelings are friendly or nuanced. About Israel, and Israel's leaders, they are unrelievedly hostile. Menachem Begin committed the ultimate crime: he talked policy to Weinberger for four hours, and made him late for dinner. Ariel Sharon tired and irritated Weinberger by showing him fortified settlements on the West Bank, and revealed how sinister he was by baldly admitting that they had been intentionally placed on higher ground than the surrounding Arab towns. Israel's June 1982 incursion into Lebanon occurred because Israel (or Sharon), "greatly vexed" that the PLO was complying with a cease-fire negotiated by our emissary, Philip Habib, set the "wholly untenable" condition that the PLO stop attacking "Jews anywhere in the world"; the shooting of the Israeli ambassador to London then offered Israel a convenient "pretext" for the invasion, even though "our intelligence sources supported the belief" (no facts here) that it was not Arafat but Arafat's rival Abu Nidal who ordered the attack (so presumably Israel should have been grateful?).

Weinberger also denounces Israel for requesting, later in the summer of 1982, that the Syrian forces which had entered Lebanon and were camped outside Beirut be withdrawn simultaneously with its own troops. But this, according to Weinberger, would have "suggested legal and moral equivalence [of the Syrians] with the Israeli presence." For Weinberger, Syria stood on a higher "legal and moral" plane. When the dastardly Israelis then dropped their insistence on a parallel Syrian withdrawal and left unilaterally, as the Americans had asked, the result, writes Weinberger, "was that the security in and around Beirut deteriorated and the United States-backed Lebanese government and army were seen to be impotent. Now the Marines were in far greater danger than before."

WHO killed the 241 Marines on October 23, 1983? "Some faction to this day unknown." There is no suggestion whatsoever that the Syrians on the doorstep were even indirectly responsible. But there is a torrent of innuendo that the Marines were killed, and the U.S. embassy was bombed, thanks to objective conditions for which the Israelis bore primary responsibility.

How does one reconcile Weinberger's punctilious refusal to hold accountable the Syrians, self-declared enemies of his country, with his eager credence of the darkest rumors about Israel and the lowest construction of Israel's motives? Surely not in terms of statecraft. For a statesman, even the worst of states that supports your basic interests, does not kill your people, and stands with you in the crunch is to be preferred to a state that opposes your basic interests, kills your people, and sides with your worst enemies. And where the U.S. is concerned, how much more should this be the case when the state that is your friend is a democracy, and the state that is your enemy is a tyranny.

It would be futile to search for a rational principle to explain Weinberger's insufficiencies as a craftsman of defense and diplomacy. This book shows that his mind has been shaped not by a complex of reasons, but by attitudes and biases that he himself long ago ceased examining.

Diamond Vision

MEN AT WORK: THE CRAFT OF BASEBALL. By GEORGE WILL. *Macmillan. 353 pp. $19.95.*

Reviewed by EDWARD NORDEN

INTELLECTUALS and would-be intellectuals cannot seem to leave baseball alone. They try to play it in their childhood and youth, then they give up and chronically think, talk, dream, and write about it for the rest of their lives. The trouble with this bench-bound, potbellied tribe is that they continue to pay romantic attention to a game long after they should have grown up.

Not that George Will is blatant about *his* romanticizing. On the contrary, he starts by announcing that major-league ball is a serious business. An "intelligent fan" has to be aware of this. And why be an intelligent fan? Because, Will writes, being one "is an activity, a form of appreciating that is good

EDWARD NORDEN *reviewed Judith Miller's* One, by One, by One *in last month's* COMMENTARY.

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for the individual's soul, and hence for society."

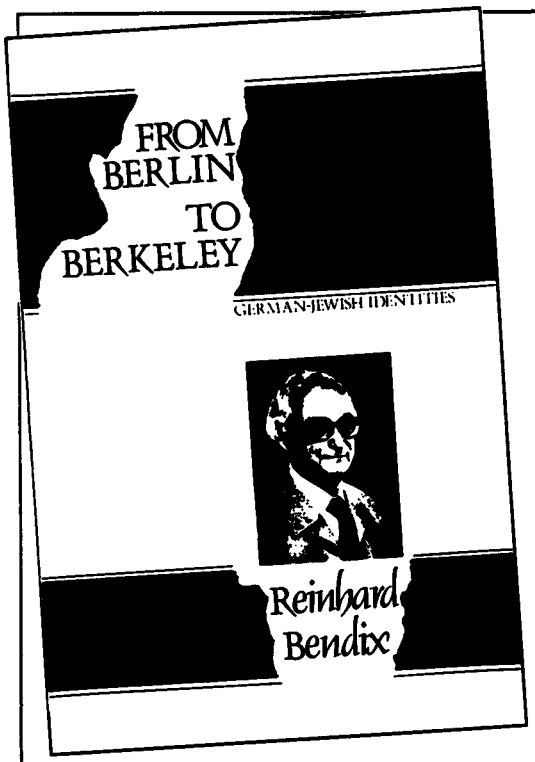
Himself a fan since before he started wearing glasses, an ex-philosophy instructor and now a famous columnist and TV commentator, Will fulfilled an American boy's fantasy in order to write this book. That is, he played hooky from his Washington beat for much of the 1989 season, hanging around instead in dugouts and airports with four craftsmen whose business it is to play baseball for a living. And they play it very well—the manager featured in Will's book is the Oakland Athletics' Tony La Russa, and the equally perfectionistic and devoted pitching, hitting, and defensive aces are Orel Hershiser of the Los Angeles Dodgers, Tony Gwynn of the San Diego Padres, and Cal Ripken, Jr. of the Baltimore Orioles.

"Nice guys," Leo Durocher said, "finish last." What Will most admires in his heroes, and what he would like his readers to learn a lesson from, is that without resorting to nastiness, they win more often than not, and this thanks not so much to the physical gifts which in the majors are taken for granted as to a correct attitude toward their work and, by analogy, to life in general. Will's ballplayers, none of whom lacks some sense of humor, are described as perpetually sober. No booze, no drugs. They hone their skills without let-up, they constantly think, anticipate, analyze, attend to details. They take every lawful advantage, plus a few in the shadow zone, and when they lose a game they do not allow themselves to be undermined. No, they perform cool post-mortems, the more excellently to play again.

As for their game, though it could not be more competitive, it is not brutal like the football Will despises. Rather, it is a virtuous, elegant, non-bloody equivalent of war:

> La Russa wants the other team to look out from its dugout "and get real bad vibes" about his team's physical and mental aggressiveness. He wants them to be saying, or at least thinking, "Oh, man, do you see those A's, with all that talent, they're not just out here letting the numbers fall into place. Did you see that slide into second base? He just knocked our pivot man into left field. Did you see the way José handled that two-strike situation, the way he spread it out, put the ball into play? See what McGwire did? They're down by three runs so he took the 2-and-0 pitch. See McGwire take the ball to right field with a runner on second base?" La Russa says, "That's what happened last year. I had managers tell me, 'I hate to say it, but your club is fun to watch.'"

As THIS passage suggests, George Will's book is not for Central European intellectuals, women, or anyone else who failed to learn in childhood how a pivot man func-



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tions. Will assumes a familiarity with such fundamentals—and to judge from his book's position atop the best-seller list, he made a shrewd assumption. There are obviously masses of Americans, not eggheads, who not only care about baseball but do not have to be told why it is good to take the ball to right field with a runner on second base. They have responded by making a hit of this book, even though Will is a man with a reputation as a syndicated killjoy, and a literate one at that.

In a previous book George Will wrote: "I trace the pedigree of my philosophy to Burke, Newman, Disraeli, and others who were more skeptical, even pessimistic, about the modern world than most people are who today call themselves conservatives." While Ronald Reagan, the man whom Will backed for President in 1980, might declare that it was morning again in America, Will himself has never publicly succumbed to such optimism. Not that he is grim on TV or in his columns—actually, he is usually bright—only that he does try to keep his view "skeptical, even pessimistic," as if he were some kind of European.

This, however, is tough to do when you are mining lodes of statistics to prove that the Great American Pastime is being played on a higher and better level than ever before. In fact, everything about *Men at Work* is optimistic and cheerful. On the whole, and especially compared with other writers on baseball, Will does shun both shagginess and lyricism. But his basically romantic feelings cannot be denied—he himself, having first denied them, calls baseball "a game that brings out the romantic in the best of its fans."

First and foremost, Will is a romantic in his unreserved admiration not only for the stars like La Russa but also for the troopers who will never be in any Hall of Fame or earn a million. He admires these men not so much for their skills as for their attitude, their philosophy, which is one of devotion, never fanaticism—the one ballplayer Will disapproves of is the disgraced Pete Rose, whose "admirable intensity" became, even before his banishment for betting and his being jailed for tax evasion, a "disfiguring obsession."

Second, it takes a romantic, or at least someone with a defect in the tragic sense of life, to argue that baseball today is better than it was when Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams were in uniform. Third, it is nothing short of romantic to justify today's salaries, as Will does, on the ground that "money attracts talent" and that major-league ball is "a model of a good society, where . . . excellence is rewarded." Admittedly, unlike in publishing, where bad books are tending to drive out good on account of the bottom line, baseball is still, as Will says, "the severest meritocracy." Yet DiMaggio and Williams did what they did for a measly $100,000 per season. And lesser men, no doubt foolishly, used to play for much, much less, played in fact more for love than for money. In those days, was the game, the business, not such a good model for society, or has America itself gone into a slump?

Will understands that it has. He would otherwise not have had the excuse to hang out in good conscience with La Russa, Hershiser, Gwynn, Ripken & Company. "A nation's preferred forms of recreation," he asserts, "are not of trivial importance." Granted. But what about a nation's preferred means of traveling to and from such recreation, or of viewing it from its living rooms? What if Mazdas and Sonys are preferred by Americans over red-white-and-blue products?

For Will, this is a problem and a symptom of decline about which he is both serious and explicit. "My interest in writing this book," he concludes, "has been to have fun exploring the spirit and practice and ethic of something fun, sport. But I cannot forbear from drawing a lesson." Americans, he urges, should not just enjoy the best ballplayers but follow their example. "If Americans made goods and services the way Ripken makes double plays, Gwynn makes hits, Hershiser makes pitches, and La Russa makes decisions, you would hear no more about the nation's trajectory having passed its apogee."

A fan of *Men at Work* is entitled to wonder. After all, if America's place in the industrial and financial sun has been elbowed into by the putative losers of World War II, it is mainly—is it not?—because of the genius of the Japanese and Germans. And even if Americans could be persuaded to take their cue from their all-stars, and work, hustle, and invent like Victorians, they probably could not bring back the days when the U.S. was alone in the world. At best, America would become somewhat more competitive.

Even to achieve just that, it would first be necessary to enforce a standard of universal literacy—which would certainly be no fun. Will's ballplayers are probably smart enough to understand this, if not to put it into words. Poor La Russa and the others, in fact, must have been depressed to learn from Will that the future of their country rides on its willingness to adopt them as role models. Once upon a time there were plenty of politicians and businessmen, soldiers and priests, scientists and even artists, with enough of the right stuff to serve this purpose. If America has come to the point where its children have only latter-day Babe Ruths to emulate, then the implications of our current number-one nonfiction best-seller are pessimistic enough to give Burke, Newman, and Disraeli pause. Or did Will, originally a fan of the Chicago Cubs, not intend to be taken quite so seriously?

Religion & People

The Encyclopaedia of Judaism. Editor-in-Chief, Geoffrey Wigoder. *Macmillan. 768 pp. $75.00.*

Reviewed by Chaim Raphael

What is a Jew? Yet another chance to tackle this thorny old question beckons with the pub-

Chaim Raphael *is the author of many books on Jewish history and culture. His new book,* The Festivals: A History of Jewish Celebration, *has just been published in England and will be brought out in the U.S. early next year by Grove Weidenfeld.*

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lication of the massive one-volume *Encyclopaedia of Judaism*. By definition such a book is a prisoner of the alphabet, and hence darts all over the place: does it nevertheless end up with a single identifiable theme?

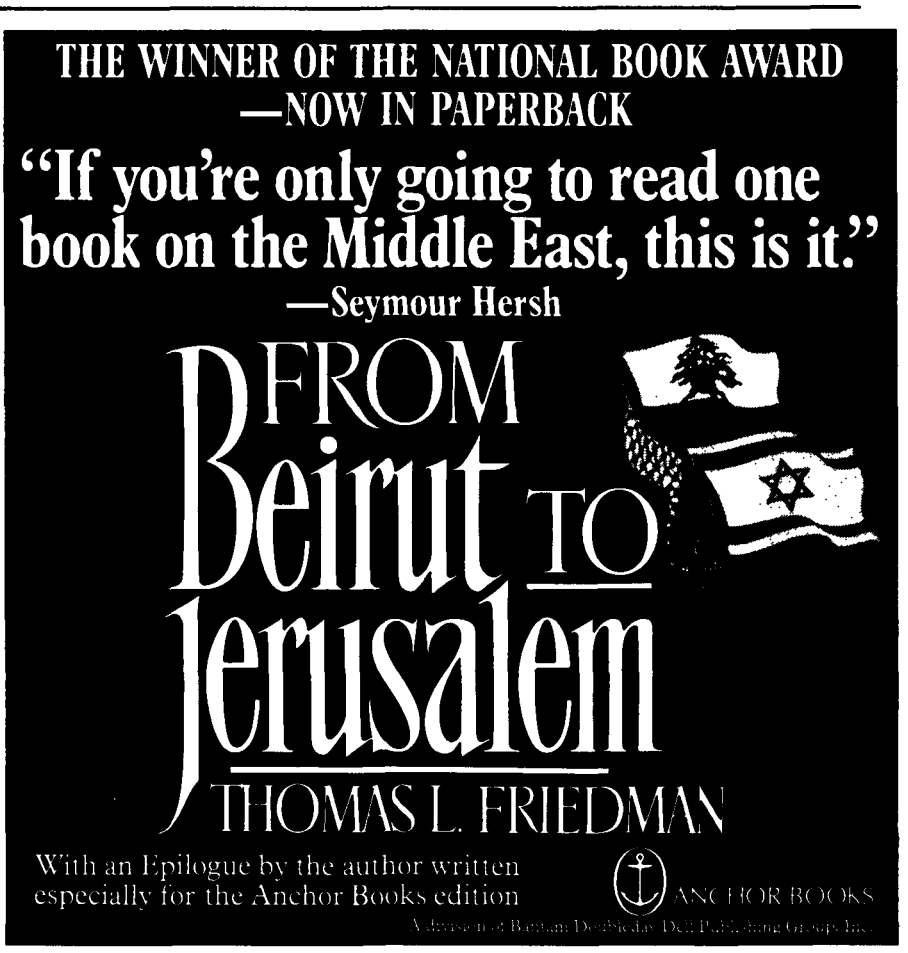
Thanks to its distinguished editor, Geoffrey Wigoder, who also served as editor-in-chief of the 16-volume *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, and to his supporting cast of nearly 80 scholars, one can be confident that this work will provide authoritative answers to the particular, sporadic questions for which one turns to a reference book of any kind. Thumbing the pages of this particular reference book, one is also rewarded by the great range of colorful illustrations that make it pleasing aesthetically as well as informative on intellectual grounds. Most heartening of all is the strong hint in the preface that a deliberate effort has been made here to be precise in deciding what, in fact, is a Jew.

As AGAINST the usual assumption that the term covers a convoluted range of things—what Jews believe, how they historically expressed those beliefs, how they behave in society, how they feel about themselves and the non-Jewish world around them, etc.—in this book only one aspect of being Jewish is considered: that "which the Western world calls religious." Thus, the *Encyclopaedia* does not include any consecutive account of the events of Jewish history. Nor do "Famous Jews" appear, "unless they have contributed to the development of Judaism" as a religious system.

In some ways this is a valid approach. Unfortunately, however, we need only look at individual articles to see that it does not really work; for try as the assembled scholars might to focus solely on religious definitions, their work of explication is constantly being colored and complicated by a not-quite-religious element which the preface itself calls *yiddishkeit*—"Jewishness." And not only in the text: what, one may ask, is purely religious in the display of pages from the fabulous 15th-century Nurnberg Haggadah, showing the Israelites (in 15th-century costume) making their way safely through the Red Sea escorted by angels flying overhead and pursued by Pharaoh's army on horseback, with banners aloft and tracked by captions in Hebrew and Yiddish?

Yiddishkeit, in fact, enfolds one everywhere. An attractive series of "panels" has been inserted here and there in the *Encyclopaedia*, in which there appear such items as "The Seven Wedding Blessings" or pithy sayings by famous religious personages. One such panel consists of aphorisms ascribed to the "Kotsker" rabbi—Menachem Mendel of Kotsk (1787-1859)—a man characterized by a relentless passion for a particularly intense form of Hasidism, but also a man whose sayings reveal a much milder outlook: "Whoever has a place anywhere has a place everywhere," and "The whole world is not worth sighing over, not even a single sigh." A similarly homey spirit enlivens the populist anecdotes reported of the Maggid (preacher) of Dubnow, Rabbi Jacob Kranz (1741-1804). For example: an army cadet once asked the rabbi on a shooting range how he had managed to score an amazing series of bullseyes. "First I shoot," the Maggid explained, "and then I draw a circle around each bullet hole." This, he went on, was also the secret of his preaching. The marvelous parables with which he peppered his discourse struck home with his huge audiences because he had prepared them for the moral "circle" to be drawn around each shot.

The cheerful good humor of Rabbi Kranz held tremendous appeal for one of the greatest religious scholars of all time, the Gaon of Vilna, who spent virtually his entire life shut off in his attic room, away from the companionship of ordinary Jews. We learn anecdotally that in 1790, when the Gaon fell ill, he invited the Maggid to come to Vilna "to entertain and revive him." One cannot but associate this anecdote with a parallel expe-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rience 150 years later: the great scientist and Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann would, when depressed, often summon to his side a decidedly non-religious *maggid* of his day, Shmarya Levin, a Russian Jewish political leader of coruscating wit.

NEITHER Weizmann nor Levin, needless to say, is mentioned in this book. Of the subjects that are so mentioned, several may serve as starting points for reflections on the theme of what-is-a-Jew, even if they do not get a reader far on the road. A supreme test-case is the lengthy article (some 7,500 words) on the Bible. It is a mine of information, supplementing its rather traditional coverage of this vast subject with excellent notes on new discoveries. Yet once again there is, as it were, a hole in the middle, since the article makes no reference at all to the extraordinary human impact that the Bible has exercised for 3,000 years.

Thus, in discussing the early history of the Bible, the *Encyclopaedia* correctly mentions that when the Jewish people returned from exile in Babylonia in the 5th century B.C.E., Ezra read "the book of the Torah of Moses" to them in solemn assembly, an act which helped elevate the Torah "to its unique position in Jewish life." What the article does not say is that according to the biblical report itself, when the people were given Ezra's interpretation, they wept. As Fernanda Eberstadt remarked in these pages a couple of years ago ("Responding to the Bible," January 1988), "Not the smallest lesson contained in this episode of mass exultation is its reminder to us that the Bible is very likely the first legal and sacred book in human history intended not for a royal and/or priestly caste but for all—for, as we would say, a general audience."

This same emphasis on the Bible as a document meant for humans-as-they-are is extended by Eberstadt to the Hebrew spirit itself: "cheerful, pragmatic, reasonable, sociable, almost mundane, an effort not to vanquish human nature but to temper and govern it." (A perfect description, as it happens, of the spirit of the Maggid of Dubnow.) The *Encyclopaedia* captures something of this in its excellent article on "Ethics," which goes back to the Bible for numerous practical illustrations of the way in which God Himself frames His actions in "natural" moral terms. Ethical behavior in the Bible is thus always presented as an "imitation of God," in whose image man is created. And the same moral attitude characterizes the ancient rabbis, for whom "the highest reaches of religious experience" lie in qualities like *hasidut* (kindliness) and *anavah* (humility). Every rabbinical saying quoted in this article centers on the relationship *bein adam l'havero* ("between a man and his fellow-men"), while drawing force as well from "the involvement of God" that "imparts a quality of urgency and passion . . . unique to Judaism."

IT IS inevitable that with such a range of contributors, the treatment of basic subjects will be uneven: the parts, one might say, are greater than the whole. One disappointment is the article on "Theology," little more than a long, strung-out list of different views. "Mysticism," by contrast, is given a good analytic treatment (though without any mention of the name of its revolutionary expositor, Gershom Scholem). Also praiseworthy is the long and clear explanation of the power that Halakhah (religious law) exercises in Jewish belief, and in particular how its rigorous character is reconciled, at times, with issues of conscience. As an appendix to this, perhaps the most intriguing discussion in the book is the surprisingly long article entitled "Halakhah and Technology." Here consideration is given to, on the one hand, the way the Halakhah handles problems posed by modern technology, and, on the other hand, the way technical advances such as computers may be applied to the study of the Halakhah and its observance.

Perhaps more convincingly, it is archeology, rather than technology, which has enabled us to develop a new appreciation for the wondrous survival of Judaism—and also of *yiddishkeit*. For me, one especially exciting recent moment occurred in 1986, with the discovery and then the decipherment of two silver amulets, the size of cigarettes, bearing Hebrew writing from the time of the First Temple (7th century B.C.E.). Here, dug out of a tomb on Mount Zion, were three verses, beginning "May the Lord bless thee and keep thee," which from their recording in the Book of Numbers (6:24-6) were destined to become the most familiar blessing in all Jewish and Western history.

Part of the wonder here is simply to see archaic Hebrew writing at least 400 years older than the Dead Sea Scrolls, enshrining a message that was due to survive unchanged for nearly three millennia. But an even more intense wonder is to recognize that though the bestowal of this blessing became a privilege of the priestly caste, and indeed the verses themselves came to be known collectively as the Priestly Blessing, in those early centuries the words were meant to be the possession of ordinary people, people who would hang them, inscribed on amulets, around their necks. These were, precisely, the kind of Jews who also responded with tears when Ezra read to them the Book of the Torah.

O Pioneer

WILLA CATHER: DOUBLE LIVES. By HERMIONE LEE. *Pantheon. 410 pp. $29.95.*

Reviewed by RACHEL FLICK

WILLA CATHER'S subject was America. The country "works on my mind," she said in 1925, "like light on a photographic plate." But even in one of her most beautiful "photos" of our young country, her novel of the Nebraska pioneers, *My Antonia* (1918), the subject induced grief as well as fascination. The title page of *My Antonia* expresses that grief in its invocation from Virgil: "*Optima dies . . . prima fugit*—The best days are the first to flee."

For Cather, writing itself was the solution. At a dark point in the novel the narrator, Jim Burden,

RACHEL FLICK *is an editor at the* Reader's Digest.

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ponders another line from Virgil: "I shall be the first, if I live, to bring the Muse into my country." This is glossed by the English critic Hermione Lee, in her new biography of Willa Cather, as follows: "Cather as Jim consoles herself for her lost youth (and for the lost golden age of American pioneering history) by turning the figures of her local past into an American pastoral."

Cather's pastorals sought to bestow on the extension of the American enterprise across the West the stature it deserved. One part of that enterprise in particular attracted her: not so much the American political system as the American people and the way they were cultivating and inhabiting a new and wild land. She seems to have been attached to America largely because it was new, and hence presented the opportunity to civilize, order, and create. For her, the taming of the wilderness was a moral enterprise.

Loving a country because it is new creates a problem: every generation cannot be the one to civilize the wilderness. How can a proper drive to make and build persist amid the change which these same impulses bring about? In a 1923 essay Cather wrote of the "generation that subdued the wild land and broke up the prairie":

> With these old men and women the attainment of material prosperity was a moral victory, because it was wrung from hard conditions, was the result of a struggle that tested character. They can look out over those broad stretches of fertility and say, "We made this, with our backs and hands."

What, Cather went on to wonder, would replace them? The question animates more than one of her novels.

HERMIONE LEE's book is a thorough and useful work of criticism, made up mostly of analysis of Cather's works rather than straight biography. As her life waned, Cather thwarted future biographers by burning her letters and declining interviews. We do learn here, though, that she was born in Virginia in 1873 to a sweet-natured and gentlemanly father and a remote, discontented Southern mother. At age nine, she moved with her family to Red Cloud, Nebraska, a physical and spiritual journey she gorgeously recreates in *My Antonia*. Provincial Red Cloud frustrated the young Cather. As soon as she had the means she escaped, first to college in Lincoln, Nebraska, then into journalism, and ultimately to New York City, where she became managing editor of *McClure's* magazine.

In 1908, Lee tells us, a crucial letter from Sarah Orne Jewett persuaded Cather to abandon the grinding responsibilities of producing a magazine and dedicate herself to fiction. Cather, says Lee, later felt grateful that she had escaped journalism at the right moment: after she had learned what it had to teach her about factuality and concision and before it could crush her spirit and imagination.

Beginning her novelistic career as a mature woman, Cather soon found her subject and her voice. The breakthrough was a great short story, "The Enchanted Bluff." In this work, a band of Nebraska schoolboys is mesmerized by the story of a high, remote desert bluff inhabited in ancient times by a since-destroyed tribe of Indians. "The paradox of her life and work," writes Lee, "is that the place they escape from [Nebraska] is the place she had to get back to for her true subject."

Cather did not develop with her times, to her sorrow. In 1922 she wrote disconsolately to Dorothy Canfield, "We knew one world and what we felt about it, now we find ourselves in quite another." Lee tells us that Cather rejected "economic and social reform, psychoanalysis and Marxism." She spurned "O'Neill, Cubism, Pound, and Stein," bemoaned Futurist painting, wide-open art forms, and the "disappearance of the concept of sin." Ultimately (and notwithstanding her many writings about Catholicism), Cather was confirmed in the Episcopal Church.

Lee handles Cather's apparent lesbianism with tact and perspective. I say "apparent" because, as Lee stresses, a "fact" which Cather herself never acknowledged or even

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discussed, however undeniable it may seem, must remain in the category of speculation. Lee notes that in her youth Cather called herself "William," cropped her hair, and dressed in men's clothing. But Lee also says that Cather "outgrew" these ostentations, and notes that she wrote in 1896, "Bohemia is preeminently the kingdom of failure."

While other biographers have read Cather closely for homoerotic tendencies, Lee disdains this as "patronizing and narrow. . . . It makes her out to be a coward (which was certainly not one of her failings); and it assumes that 'openness' would have been preferable." Lee appears to understand the potential power of repression to heighten sensuality in art. Cather, she concludes, "was a writer who worked, at her best, through indirection, suppression, and suggestion, and through a refusal to be enlisted."

Unenlisted, indeed. Cather, writes Lee, did not "have the slightest interest in political support among women." In fact, Cather disdained most women writers, blasting them for having "a sort of sex consciousness that is abominable. They are so limited to one string and they lie so about that." (She exempted George Eliot, Jane Austen, and the Brontë sisters from this attack.) In this context, as Lee correctly observes, Cather's most autobiographical character, Thea Kronborg in *Song of the Lark* (1915), differs from the usual heroines who, in Cather's words, "really expect the power of love to fill and gratify every need of life." Thea says she longs to be "waking up every morning with the feeling that your life is your own, and your strength is your own, and your talent is your own; that you're all there, and there's no sag in you."

Most women, Cather complained, "are so horribly subjective and have such scorn for the healthy commonplace." It is not a failing she shared. The strength of her writing derives from her ability to reveal the subjective through the meticulous use of the commonest kind of observed detail. Few other writers can match her power of description—or her power to illuminate the transcendent meaning of what she describes.

In *Willa Cather: Double Lives*, Hermione Lee works carefully through each of the major novels and stories, documenting the knowledge and discipline behind the apparently artless texts she recognizes as the "sophisticated grafting of an American subject onto a classical form." Her discussion of Wagnerian themes and references, and her comparisons of Cather's pastorals with other works in that tradition, are well-substantiated and interesting.

Yet in one respect the book grates. While Lee admires the skill with which Cather deploys allusions and executes certain classical forms, and while she will grudgingly admit that "in fact, the settling of the old West was an amazing process," she does not share Cather's belief in the grandeur of her subject. This leads her to read as metaphor or even delusion material Cather might well have wanted read straight.

In particular, Lee candidly acknowledges a preference for Cather's more troubled works; she remains relatively detached from the few that frankly glorify and celebrate. Thus Lee criticizes Cather's World War I novel, *One of Ours* (1922), for "completely failing to take on the disillusioning process of the war itself (as Dos Passos and Hemingway so passionately do)." And in her discussion of *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927), "the most appeased and celebratory of all [Cather's] novels," Lee writes that "readers like myself who admire that dark phase of Cather's writing above all the rest" might miss the "something ferocious and unreconciled" to be found in her other works.

Others, however, might not. A passage from *Death Comes for the Archbishop* captures well the spiritual source of Cather's passion, her troubled passion, for America. Here the archbishop, Father Jean Marie Latour, reflects on why he has decided to die in New Mexico where he has lived and worked as a missionary instead of in France, his home. The reason, he concludes, has to do with the "peculiar quality in the air of new countries" that "vanished after they were tamed by man." Cather writes:

> Beautiful surroundings, the society of learned men, the charm of noble women, the graces of art, could not make up to him for the loss of those lighthearted mornings of the desert, for that wind that made one a boy again. . . . He did not know just when it had become so necessary to him, but he had come back to die in exile for the sake of it. Something soft and wild and free, something that whispered to the ear on the pillow, lightened the heart, softly, softly picked the lock, slid the bolts, and released the prisoned spirit of man into the wind, into the blue and gold, into the morning, into the morning!

Art, Cather once observed, "is an effort to make a sheath, a mold, in which to imprison for a moment the shining, elusive element which is life itself." What one wants from the biography of any artist is to learn how that mystery is achieved and by what creature. That is a distant goal and Lee does not reach it. But, reservations aside, she is a helpful guide who respects her subject, and her book provides a welcome occasion to revisit some of our most beautiful American fiction.

Race & Equality

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONAL POLICY. By HUGH DAVIS GRAHAM. *Oxford University Press. 578 pp. $29.95.*

Reviewed by MURRAY FRIEDMAN

IN HIS new book, Hugh Davis Graham, a historian at the University of Maryland, has made a significant contribution to our understanding of one of the critical social-policy issues of our time. The essence of the story lies in the

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MURRAY FRIEDMAN *served as vice chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission from September 1986 to December 1989. His book on the history of the black-Jewish alliance is scheduled to be published by The Free Press in 1992.*

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transformation of what Graham calls Phase I of the civil-rights revolution—the fight to end legalized discrimination against blacks—into the "gray contrivance of statutory law and bureaucratic imagination" (Phase II) we are living with today. In over five hundred pages of text and notes he traces this shift from a movement to obtain equal rights—enunciated by Martin Luther King, Jr., at the great 1963 March on Washington, as an effort to build an America in which children would be measured by the content of their character and not by the color of their skin—to a system of distributive or compensatory justice that has distorted our political values and been the cause of ever-growing racial strife.

The transformation began in the very midst of the great triumph of the civil-rights revolution, namely, passage of the omnibus Civil Rights Act of 1964. During the fight for this legislation such figures as Whitney Young of the Urban League and James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) began to entertain the notion of "affirmative-action" programs designed along the lines of New Deal models like the National Labor Relations Act. They were abetted in their thinking by a group of intellectuals and social activists, including Herbert Hill of the staff of the NAACP and Alfred W. Blumrosen, a professor of law at Rutgers. For all of these men, the main issue was no longer one of simply wiping out racial discrimination and thus ensuring equality of opportunity. "Equal treatment was desirable," Graham summarizes their argument, "but not where it produced unequal results." To arrive at equal results, they favored a system of explicit racial preference.

At the time, there was a sharp reaction against this idea from President Kennedy; from Bayard Rustin, deputy director of the March on Washington; from Walter Reuther and George Meany representing the labor movement; and from many other figures within American liberalism. Then-Vice President Johnson objected that the race-conscious policies favored by Hill and the others would amount to a new form of discrimination and were "merely another way of freezing minority-group status in perpetuity." Opposition was also expressed by Clarence Mitchell, then-chief Washington lobbyist of the NAACP and a key figure in the development of Phase I. "The history of the reason why we do not include this," he told a congressional panel, "is sadly and surely proven, that the minute you put race on a civil-service form . . . you have opened the door to discrimination. . . ." Within Congress itself, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey, chief congressional architect of the Civil Rights Act, adamantly denied that the Act in any way endorsed giving "preferential treatment to any individual or group."

BUT the political tide in Washington and in the centers of elite opinion was running against Mitchell and Humphrey. Very soon, and with the more or less conscious connivance of President Johnson, the activist understanding of the civil-rights revolution prevailed and became institutionalized. Old-line civil-rights groups like the NAACP, initially resistant, quickly fell into step, and indeed became the most ardent advocates of the new dispensation. The legal staffs of these organizations, and academics like Blumrosen, were drawn upon to fill personnel slots in the administrative apparatus created by Phase I—the Office of Federal Contract Compliance, the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, etc.—which became, in effect, the governmental arm of the new civil-rights "establishment." As Graham narrates in fascinating, if excruciating, detail, there followed a whole variety of policies mandated by the courts and administered by the bureaucracy, including the imposition of racial preferences—quotas, in short—in employment practices and university admissions, busing for school desegregation, and set-asides in government contracts.

It is not surprising, perhaps, that the development of Phase II should have been accelerated by Lyndon Johnson, a Southern populist who was emotionally committed to bringing blacks and other minorities more fully into American life. The real surprise is that the program moved forward steadily under Richard Nixon. Graham suggests that, having consolidated his right wing and captured the rank-and-file of organized labor, Roman Catholics, and evangelical Protestants, Nixon sought opportunistically to add blacks to the "emerging Republican majority" (in Kevin Phillips's phrase).

But whatever his motive, it is a fact that under Nixon, for example, the Office for Civil Rights in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare put into effect an aggressive program requiring universities to set targets for preferential hiring on grounds of race (and sex) in order to remain eligible for federal contracts, while Nixon's Secretary of Labor, George Shultz, in Graham's words "a systematic manager of . . . organizational lines and boxes," went out of his way to appoint a black former professional football player, Arthur A. Fletcher, as the point man for equal-opportunity contract compliance. Fletcher kicked off his new career in 1969 by revising the "Philadelphia Plan" (created two years earlier to force integration in the recalcitrant contruction-trade unions) into a scheme requiring fixed and specific "goals or standards for percentages of minority employees," or, in other words, proportional representation by race of the kind explicitly banned by the 1964 Civil Rights Act. By early 1970, Graham reports, the Labor Department had issued rules extending the supposedly limited Philadelphia Plan model "to basically *all* of the activities and facilities of *all* federal contractors—which by Arthur Fletcher's estimate covered from one-third to one-half of all U.S. workers."

GRAHAM'S account ends in 1972, but the story he tells has continued to unfold with inexorable logic. As the 70's progressed, the pro-quota forces captured not only the administrative agencies and (often) the courts but the entire rhetoric of civil rights. As Graham himself notes, it soon became *de rigueur* even to belittle the heroic achieve-

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ments of Phase I. Thus the black historians Mary Berry and John Blassingame, in *The Struggle for Black Equality* (1982), dismissed the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965 in three sentences, observing that "political action did not improve the overall black condition," while another historian of the period claimed that the civic gains won in the 50's and 60's had been purchased at the price of widespread economic failure. (In fact, a majority of blacks entered the American middle class in relatively few years.)

With the advent of the Reagan presidency, an effort was mounted at last to restore federal civil-rights agencies to the original purposes for which they were brought into existence—fighting discrimination. Although the administration was promptly denounced for trying to move the country back to the era of institutionalized racism, the truth is that it was acting in concert with the beliefs of the vast majority of the American people, including many blacks. With extraordinarily few exceptions, Americans in general supported Phase I of the civil-rights revolution. They were also in favor of "soft" affirmative-action programs that would help ensure equality of opportunity. They have never been willing, however, to accept "hard" affirmative action in the form of racial preferences, reverse discrimination, and quotas.

In retrospect, it is possible to see that in some respects—most notably through the appointment of new justices to the federal courts and the Supreme Court—Reagan's efforts succeeded, but only partially. As for President Bush, indications so far are that he walks in the tradition of Nixon rather than in that of Reagan—for instance, he recently appointed Arthur Fletcher to head the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. It remains to be seen, moreover, what Bush will do to head off the effort now under way in Congress to override recent anti-quota decisions of the Supreme Court.

It is ironic that as redistributive approaches to social inequality are in retreat all over the world, they continue to remain strong in the United States. Sadder still is that these approaches continue to be pursued in the face of conclusive evidence that (as critics on the Left like William Julius Wilson and on the Right like Glenn Loury have noted) they benefit only the black middle class, while leaving the black underclass, in Hugh Graham's words, "further isolated and decaying." In illuminating the political processes by which we have arrived at this perversion of both justice and common sense, Graham has performed a signal intellectual service.

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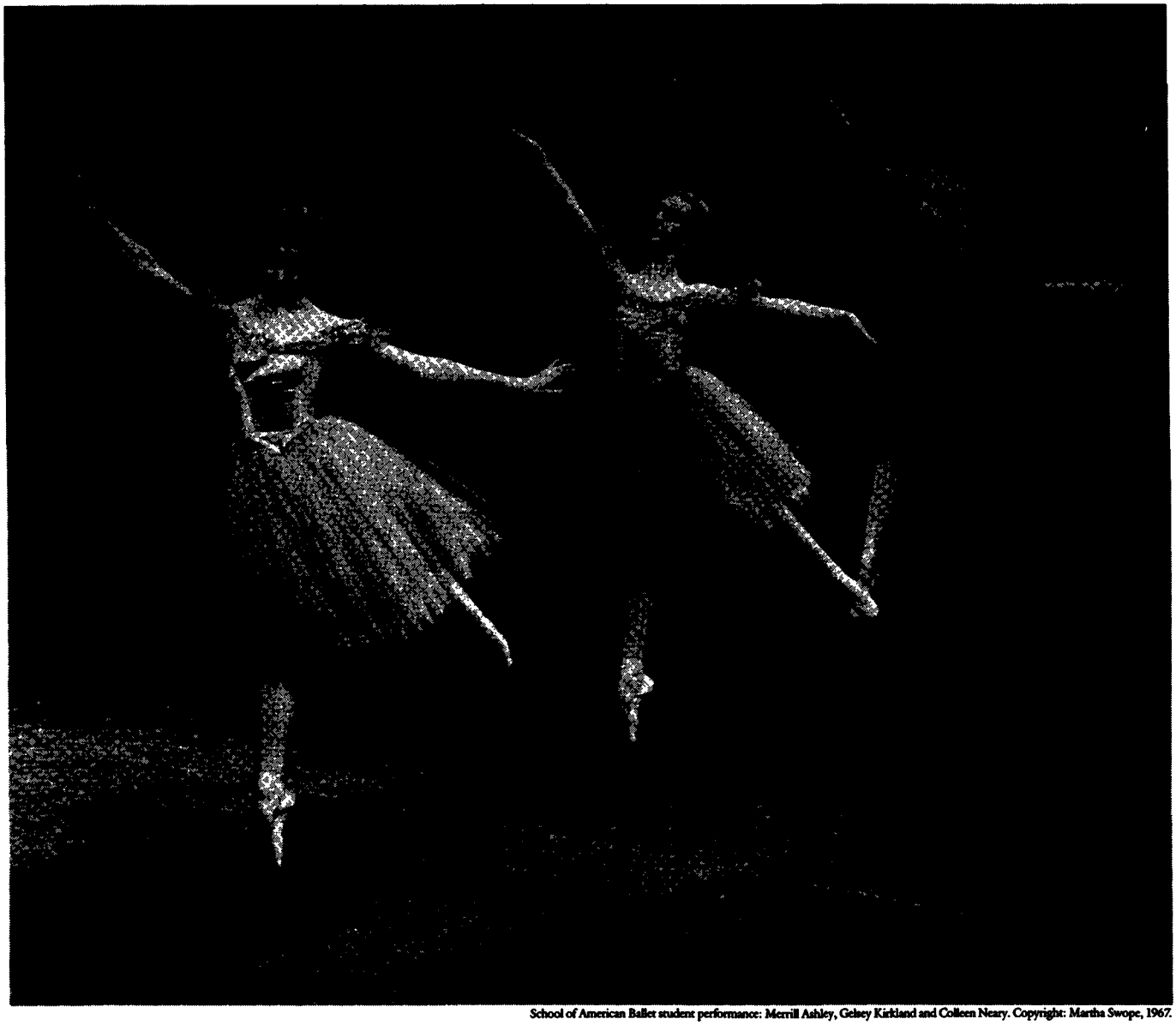

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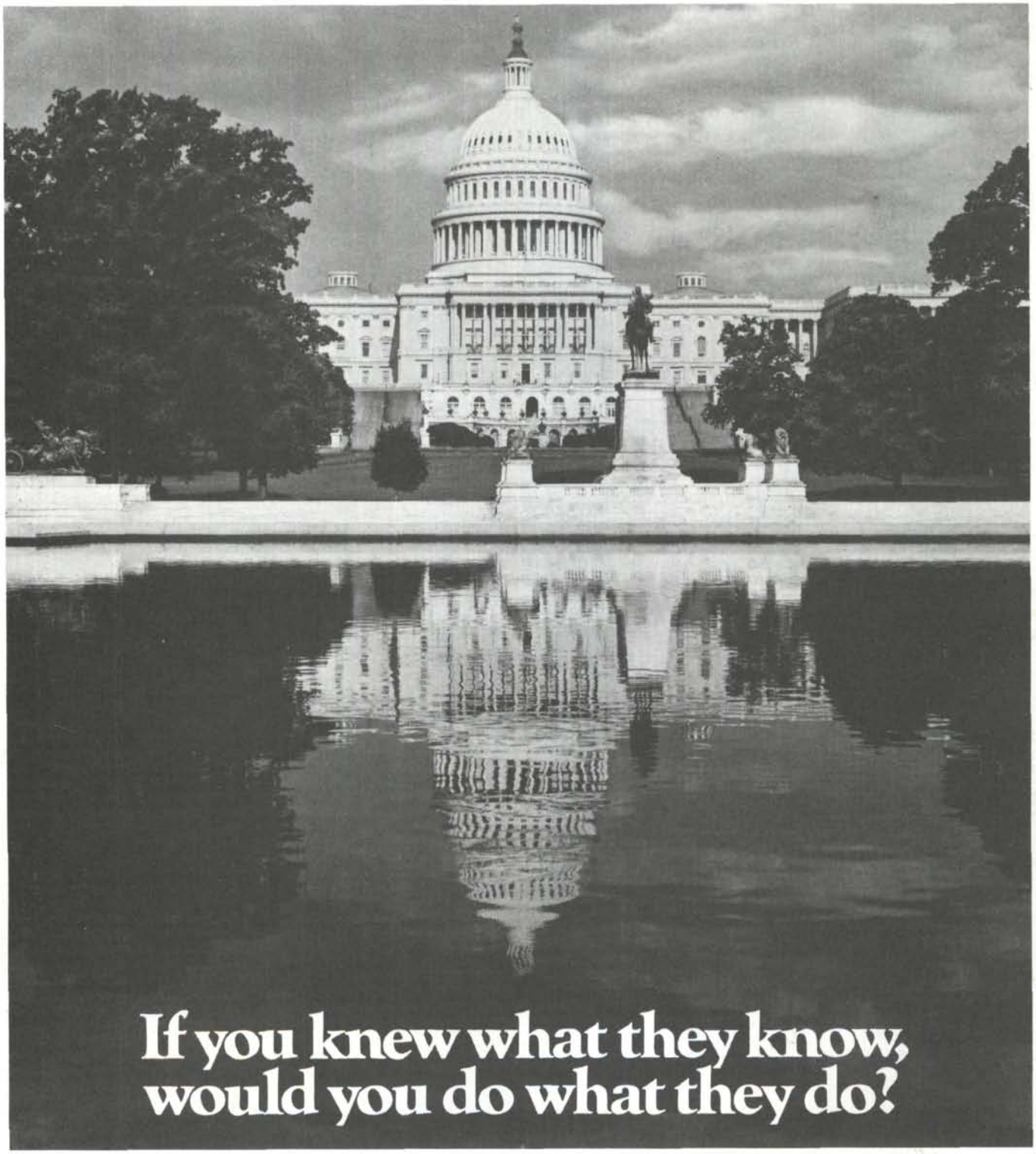

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